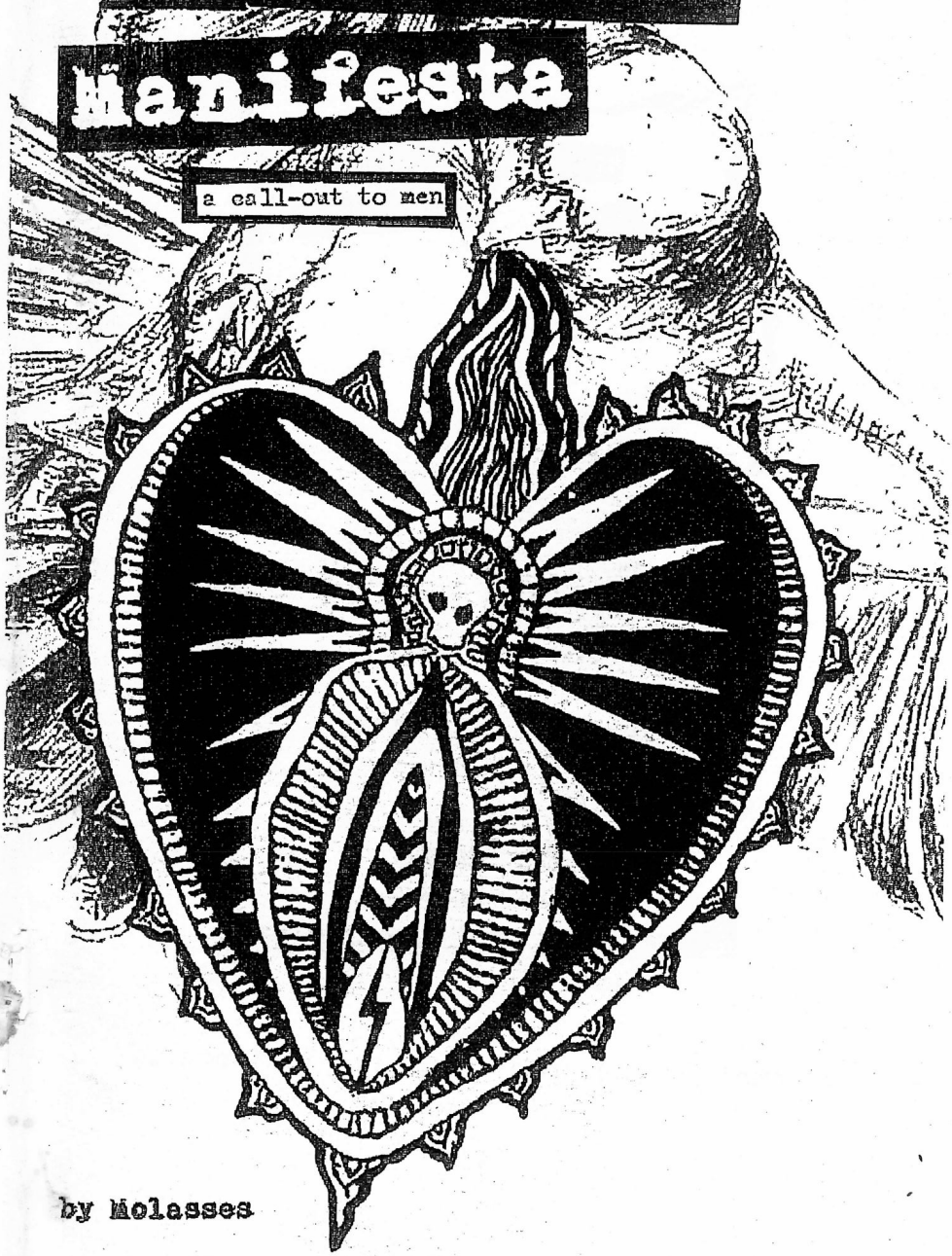
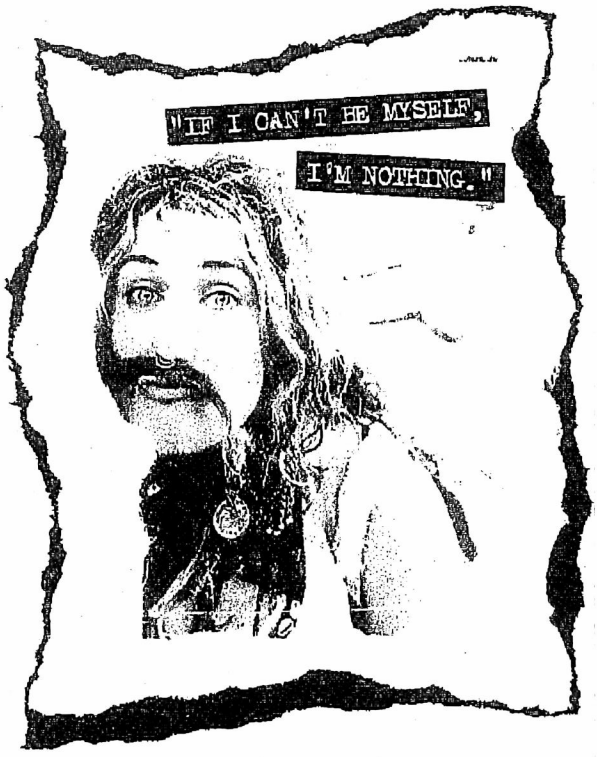
My Feminist Manifesta

a call-out to men



by Molasses



Sali Grace

September 30,1987 - September15,2008

...another victim of gendered violence...

I scream "NO!" at the women's self-defense class

and all I can think of is Sali.

I lose it.

I run outside, across the street

and to the railroad tracks to scream and cry.

I want a train to come roaring by so I can be anonymous.

I want to be anonymous,

but all I am is angry and sad,

sitting alone in some abandoned hobo camp.

Behind a warehouse. By the tracks.

I hear footsteps on the dead grass, and I don't want to be scared,

but I am.

I'm really fucking scared.

Because I'm a woman and I was taught to live in fear.

Because of all the shit I've been through

and I know the fucking monsters that are out there.

Because no matter what I do, it's never enough -

to protect myself, to define myself outside of patriarchal confines,

to respect myself,

to be myself.

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I view all men as potential rapists. I see human males as the *species* with the greatest legacy of causing pain, trauma, death, oppression, grief, loss, destruction. If you're a man or were socialized as such or identify as such and you do not see yourself in this same way, then prove it to me. Prove to me that you're not going to hurt me, rape me, stab me in the back, assert your power over me and continue your *species'* despicable legacy. Prove to me you're something more than a fist and a penis. [redacted] Prove to me I'm someone you respect, admire, worship. Prove it by dropping your ego, by consciously setting aside your pride, by unlearning your patriarchal socialization and doing what it takes to turn this shit around. Turn it upside down. Learn from my anger and my fear and my pain. Shut up, sit down, listen, learn and fucking change. And until that day, until you're standing beside me, staring my oppressors in the face, screaming "No! This isn't a world I'm willing to be a part of!" Until then, you will always be my abusive father, my sexual assaulter and Sali's rapist and murderer.

Introduction:

This zine is a short compilation of my internal and external reactions to a few situations that I found myself in during the month following Sali's murder. For those of you who don't know, Sali Grace was a friend of mine and a beautiful person and a strong and sexy woman who was brutally raped and murdered in September of this year. When I heard the news, I was staying in a house with four guys, all of whom seemed to have little interest in identity politics, gender dynamics or women's issues (although they had all had exposure to these subjects and were by no way underprivileged in their access to theory or ideology).

While I don't often expect much from the people around me, I was surprised to receive almost no emotional support and shocked at the lack of perspective they had on the issue. The general reaction of my housemates to the news was to state their condolences and then go on being the same (blindly or stubbornly?) sexist men they've grown into, either oblivious or indifferent to the shocking play of gendered violence that had just hit home and shaken my world -- a display of gendered violence that was undoubtedly built upon the dynamics which they themselves were so comfortably upholding.

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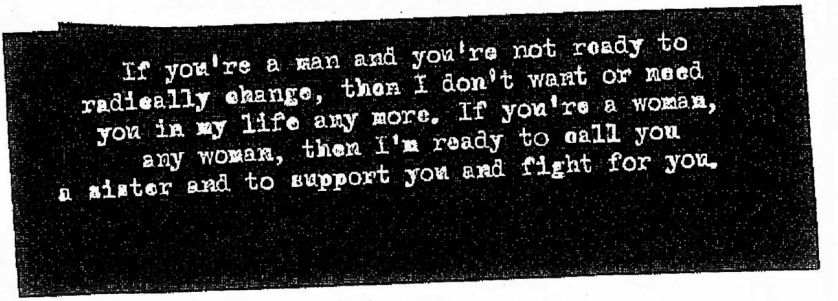
Writing this zine was really difficult for me. The words flowed easily and the emotions were there, but I wasn't quite sure how to get them out...or even if I "should" put them out there. I found myself constantly checking and re-checking, wondering if I was being too harsh or if the things that I was writing or the ways that I was writing them would be well received (or received at all) by people who were socialized as male. I found myself asking, "Should I water this down? Should I curb some of the emotion? Should I make it a bit lighter so the men who pick it up won't immediately put it down and write it off as angry man-hating rubbish???" Then I found another voice inside screaming, "I'm tired of being silenced!!! If I don't speak out now, then when? Fucking when?!? When my own mother is raped and murdered? My sister? Myself? When am I ever going to feel comfortable speaking my mind in a world that is dominated by men and dominated so completely that even the men who think they're allies are telling me that I'm outta hand and half the women I know are afraid to call themselves feminists cuz they don't want to be seen as male-bashing bitches?"

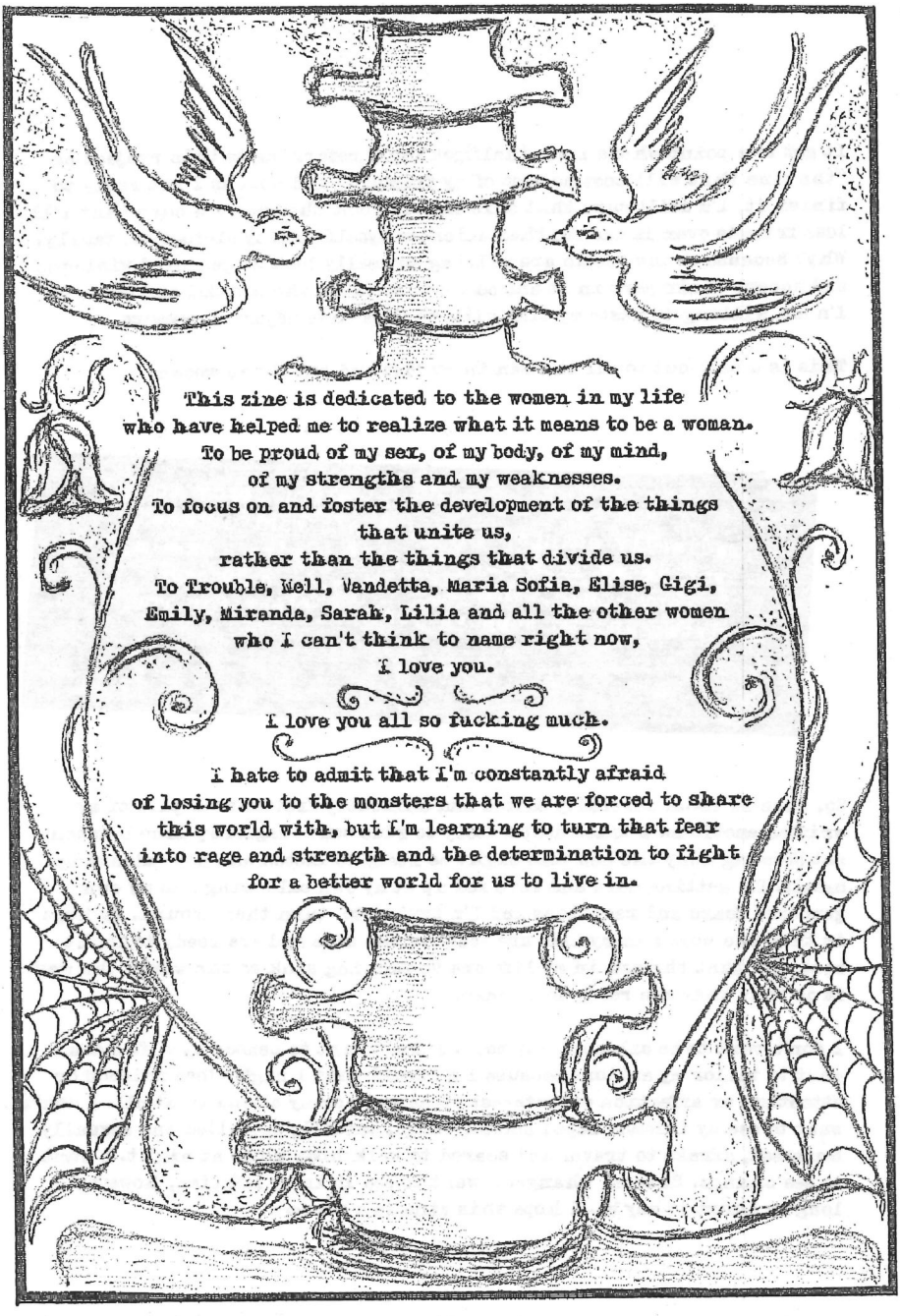
It got to a point where I was (half)jokingly referring to this project as "the zine that will cost me most of my friends." And now, as I get ready to finish it, I'm still sure that this zine'll rock the boat. I'm sure that I'll lose friends over it and further alienate myself from my biological family. Why? Because so few people are willing to really look at gendered violence and accept their part in it and begin to work on their shit, and because I'm not willing to waste my time with that passive majority anymore.

This is a call-out to all the men in my life and to all the women:


If you're a man and you're not ready to
radically change, then I don't want or need
you in my life any more. If you're a woman,
any woman, then I'm ready to call you
a sister and to support you and fight for you.

So, here it is...a carefully edited and anxiously fretted-over pile of my written emotions. I tried desperately to ride some imaginary line between not blowing away the men who might be ready to listen and not silencing myself. I'm getting more and more fed up at my own silencing and my own gendered fears and reactions and I'm trying to turn them around. My hope is that the women in my life are feeling the same and are ready to fight back and that the men in my life are so fucking sick of the world the way it is that they are ready to change.

I don't want to be silenced any more. I don't want to censor myself. I don't want to tailor my actions because I'm afraid that I might lose friends or attention or affection or interest or support or my status in it all. I don't want to see my friends raped and murdered, sexually assaulted and sexually harassed, afraid to travel and scared to walk home alone at night. I want to see change. Radical change. I want to see it in my lifetime, however long or short it may be. I hope this zine is a start.



This zine is dedicated to the women in my life
who have helped me to realize what it means to be a woman.
To be proud of my sex, of my body, of my mind,
of my strengths and my weaknesses.
To focus on and foster the development of the things
that unite us,
rather than the things that divide us.
To Trouble, Nell, Vandetta, Maria Sofia, Elise, Gigi,
Emily, Miranda, Sarah, Lilia and all the other women
who I can't think to name right now,
I love you.

I love you all so fucking much.

I hate to admit that I'm constantly afraid
of losing you to the monsters that we are forced to share
this world with, but I'm learning to turn that fear
into rage and strength and the determination to fight
for a better world for us to live in.

...and dedicated to Sali...

Jen, Yonnette, Tia, Siji, Mopachi & Molasses at the
sticker/ memorial for Sali in Cruises. We all
scribbled the wicked "SALI VIVE" across our knuckles.

...Sali, whose life(and death) have taught me so much.

Before I Get Started (A Lengthy Explanation):

A friend of mine who was editing this zine pointed out that half the content was explanation. She thought that perhaps I didn't need to dedicate so much space and effort to explaining myself, that maybe I should just spit it out, fucking say what I need to say without second-guessing myself. And, while I totally respect that input and am trying desperately to find my voice and stop censoring myself, I have decided to leave my lengthy explanations in for this reason: We are so far away from any kind of society that makes any kind of sense, we are so far away from understanding each other and from working together, from feeling safe and respected and confident, we are so confused and hurt and fucked up by so much of the shit that we have to put up with on a daily basis, that I think in order to get to a place where we can look each other in the eye and have true understanding, trust, respect and camaraderie, we need to put in the time and effort to explain what we mean, what we need, to break down the words and the meanings of words that have been defined and changed without our permission; to tell stories that paint pictures for the people around us to see where we are coming from and who we are and how that is effecting what we live and what we experience and what we speak; to get to a space where we can actually hear each others' words and understand them, without having to pass them through the enculturated filters of confusion and pain that we have been raised with.

And if half my life is spent in explanation, then perhaps the other half can be spent in understanding.

There is so much stuff that I feel like I should cover before delving into the bulk of this zine. It's a heavy zine with a lot of emotionally tied topics and a lot of hurt and a lot of pain and a lot of weighted statements. These are things that I feel and things that I live, and, although I want to scream it out and pound it into the faces of the people who surround me, because we live in such a fucked up and convoluted world, I don't feel like I can ever jump into something without explaining where I'm coming from and what my intentions are. I think this is really important. I don't want to be offensive or inconsiderate or abusive in any way. I want for my words and my ideas to be read and received in the way that they're intended. And if ANYTHING in here is offensive or if you have any questions or concerns or grievances about the things that I've written or the ways I've written them, please, please, please let me know! I really want to get as much out of

this zine as I'm giving. I want to learn and to grow along with the people around me. With you -- my family, my friends, my lovers, my comrades, my peers, my community. That said, here are a few things you should know...

Trigger:

Parts of this zine might be triggering to some folks. I cover topics that deal with abuse, rape and murder. I talk about gender and patriarchy and I use strong emotional language. If you feel that you might be triggered by something in here, please think about ways that you can reduce mental or emotional harm to yourself and wait to read it until you are in a safe place and have someone near you that understands what's going on.

Spelling & Language:

-- I'll be using the spelling *person*, rather than *persyn*, and *women*, rather than *womyn*. I respect the use of spelling that sheds a patriarchal context from feminine, gender-neutral or other-gendered words, however, I really want this to be as accessible and digestible to as many readers as possible.

-- I'll be using the word "fucking" as an adjective to express the strength and severity of my emotion. I hope that this doesn't offend any of my readers or distract from my ideas, but rather serve as an indication of my emotional state.

-- I'll be using the words "we" and "us" to refer to women, although I am in no way attempting to speak for all women or claiming that all women share the same perspectives as myself.

-- I'll be referring to "this society," meaning, basically, any of those imperialistic mega-countries (like the U.S.A. and Australia) that are so very "civilized" and "forward-thinking." (Read sarcasm here.) Although I'm aware that patriarchy and gendered socialization and violence take place pretty much everywhere in the world, I can only speak for what I've experienced personally. Two of the men in my zine were American and two were Australian, so there ya have it.

-- I'll be using fictitious names throughout my zine. I struggled over whether to include the actual names of the characters in here and eventually decided against it. Let me explain myself. On the one hand, I wanted to call people out on their shit and let the folks in my life know that if they are fucked up it just might end up in a zine for everyone to read. I don't want to protect people simply because they're my friends. I don't want to enable men to keep on being assholes just because I'm afraid of calling them out. I don't want to silence myself from

speaking out. I want for friends and lovers and community members to know where everyone stands on everything and to be able to check each other on it all. But, on the other hand, I didn't want for other folks to read this and point the finger at other men instead of looking at themselves and their own thoughts and behaviors. That said, when you read through this, remember that the characters could be anyone. The issue is that gendered socialization and power-plays effect all of us on some level. We're all guilty of it and we all need to radically shift our ideas and our actions.

-- I'll be focusing on the power dynamic of men over women and how it plays out in violence and sexual violence. While I understand that violence, both sexual and other, are by no means exclusive to this type of relationship, it is the one that I've seen the most clearly lately and the one that I have been struggling with in my own life.

-- I'm worried that my zine could be seen as supporting a gender binary, since I am basically calling for "men" to radically change in terms of "women's" oppression. I understand that there are far more than two genders and I am by no means attempting to support or reinforce a dichotomy of the sexes. However, I think it is essential that we recognize the power of socialization. This zine is a compilation of thoughts and responses of mine to various interactions with male bodied/male identified individuals. And, while I have nothing but respect for gender bending and making room for a myriad of fluid identities, I think that gendered socialization still plays a huge role in our development and, consequently, our thoughts and actions. Regardless of where you are at now in your life, if you were socialized as male in this society, chances are there's still a lot of patriarchal ideas and tendencies firmly implanted inside your mind and manifesting through your actions. I think this is something that desperately needs to be addressed and dismantled if we ever hope to move toward a community of true equality. So, if while reading this, you hear yourself saying, "Oh, that doesn't apply to me. I don't identify with the male gender." Well, try to put your defenses aside. The perspectives in this zine are coming from someone who was socialized as a woman, so if you were socialized as a man, I'm gonna bet our experiences and enculturated responses are pretty fucking different.

That said, I sincerely apologize if I offend anyone and I urge you to write to me so that I can continue to grow as a person from this writing project. But please also do check yourself on your own learned reactions, no matter how you perceive yourself, and try to understand where I am coming from on this.

Oh yeah, and this zine is a little text-heavy. I was feeling bad while putting it all together, thinking, "Damn. There's so much intense shit to read and almost no pictures. I wonder if it's gonna be too much for folks?" And then I was like, "What am I talking about?! Fuck that shit! This ain't no picture book! This ain't no children's bedtime story! This is the blood and guts of me. This is the reality. And it certainly ain't no fairy tale." So, boys, I don't give a good goddamn if the text is a tad weighty or if the zine isn't all that pretty. I'm not about to put sugar on it just to make it easier to swallow.

Glossary of Terms:

Here are some of the words I'll be using throughout this zine and their meanings...(I think it's pretty powerful to understand where our words are coming from, what they're meanings are and how they can be perceived by others. Words help to shape the world as we know it, so we'd better be careful of which ones we're using and to what ends.)

- Language
  -noun
  1. Any set or system of such symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people, who are thus enabled to communicate intelligibly with one another.

- Dominant
  -adjective
  1. Ruling, governing, or controlling; having or exerting authority or influence.
  2. Occupying or being in a commanding or elevated position.
  3. Predominant; main; major; chief.

- Subordinate
  -adjective
  1. Placed in or belonging to a lower order or rank.
  2. Of less importance; secondary.
  3. Subject to or under the authority of a superior.
  4. Subservient or inferior.
  5. Subject; dependent.

- Patriarchal
  -adjective
  1. Characteristic of a form of social organization in which the male is the family head and title is traced through the male line.
  2. Relating to or characteristic of a man who is older or higher in rank.

- Feminism
  -noun
  1. The doctrine advocating social, political and all other rights of women equal to those of men.

  2. An organized movement for the attainment of such rights for women.
  3. Feminine character.

Feminist
-noun
1. A supporter of feminism.
-adjective
1. Of or relating to or advocating equal rights for women.

Respect
-noun
1. Esteem or a sense of worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or ability, or something considered as a manifestation of a personal quality or ability.
2. Deference to a right, privilege, or privileged position or someone or something considered to have certain rights or privileges.
3. The condition of being esteemed or honored.
-verb
1. To hold in esteem or honor.
2. To show regard or consideration for.
3. To refrain from intruding upon or interfering with.

Bitch
-noun
1. A female dog.
2. Slang for a) A malicious, unpleasant, selfish person esp. a woman, b) A lewd woman, c) A complaint, or d) Anything difficult or unpleasant.
-verb
1. Slang for a) To complain/gripe or b) To spoil/bungle.

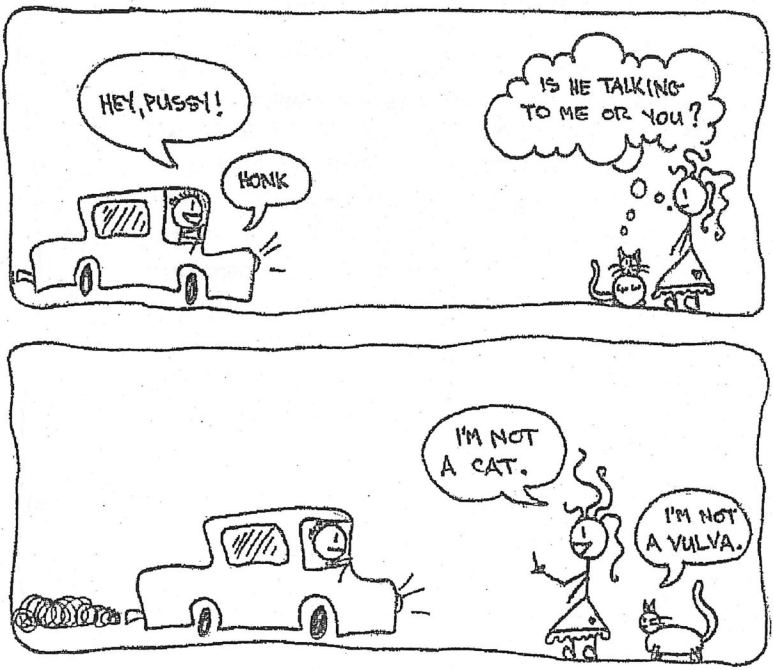
Cunt
-noun
1. Vulgar slang for a) The vulva or vagina.
2. Disparaging and offensive slang for a) A woman or b) A contemptible person.
3. Vulgar slang for a) Sexual intercourse with a woman.

Pussy
-noun
1. A cat.

2. Vulgar slang for a) The vulva or b) Sexual intercourse with a woman.
3. Offensive slang used as a) A disparaging term for a woman or b) A man regarded as weak, timid or unmanly.

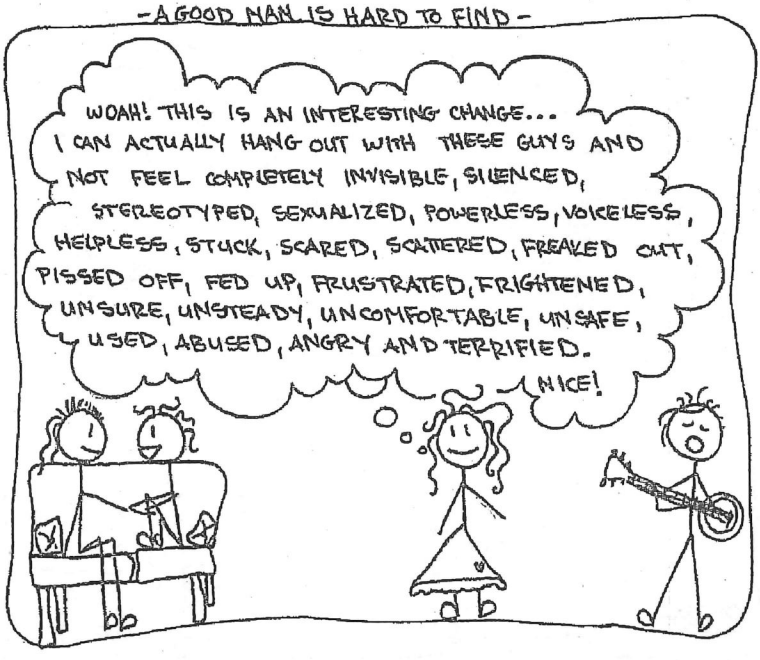
Sissy
-noun
1. An effeminate boy or man.
2. A timid or cowardly person.
3. A little girl.

Girl
-noun
1. A female child, from birth to full growth.
2. A young, immature woman.
3. A daughter.
4. Informal and sometimes offensive term for a grown woman, esp. when referred to familiarly.
5. Girlfriend, sweetheart.
6. Offensive term for a female servant.
7. Offensive term for a female employee.



Thank You:

To all the male-socialized folks who have supported me as a woman, thank you. I'm not going to put you up on a pedestal or give you a medal or anything for doing what every man should be doing, but I am saying thanks and I do want you to know what it means to me. It means that you care, really care, about my body and my mind and my world and my future and my life. It means that you care about my sisters and my mother and my friends and Sali Grace and all the women like her. It means that you care about the world in which we live...for me, for yourself and for all of us. And to those of you whom I've watched change and grow in this department (you know who you are), I want you to know that you have my respect. I know how hard it is to work on yourself, to challenge your personal life while challenging your politics, to break down your ingrained socialization and begin to see beyond that and to foster a totally different way of thinking and of acting and of living. It's been hard enough for me to challenge myself in these respects, and men like you are the ones that I am proud and happy have in my life.


-A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND-
WOAH! THIS IS AN INTERESTING CHANGE... I CAN ACTUALLY HANG OUT WITH THESE GUYS AND NOT FEEL COMPLETELY INVISIBLE, SILENCED, STEREOTYPED, SEXUALIZED, POWERLESS, VOICELESS, HELPLESS, STUCK, SCARED, SCATTERED, FREAKED OUT, PISSED OFF, FED UP, FRUSTRATED, FRIGHTENED, UNSURE, UNSTEADY, UNCOMFORTABLE, UNSAFE, USED, ABUSED, ANGRY AND TERRIFIED.
NICE!

DON'T STOP LEARNING. DONT'T STOP QUESTIONING.

DONT'T STOP LISTENING. DONT'T STOP FIGHTING.

If you dont like the world the way it is,

THEN FIGHT FOR A BETTER ONE.

And if you do like it, then ask yourself if it's

BECAUSE YOU'RE ON THE PRIVILEGED END.

Fighting for Women's Rights Means Fighting for Myself:

It means fighting for my sisters and my mother and my nieces and my grandmother and my lovers and my sisters of different wombs and of different blood - fighting for them to live in a society where they are safe and respected and loved for who they are.

It means fighting for my brothers and my father and my nephews and my friends and my lovers - fighting for them to live in a society that is based on equality and respect of all genders and all sexes.

It means fighting for my right to carve my own paths and make my own decisions, free from the fear that I was raised with, to have relationships with women that are based on unity rather than competition and to be seen as a whole person instead of just a pussy and a set of tits.

It means fighting for my right to have sex and to enjoy it, to have sex and cum every time, to have sex and not feel like I'm being raped or assaulted or pressured or harassed or manipulated or coerced, or not to have sex at all, if that's what I choose, and to not be viewed as a bitch, a prude, a tight-ass, a spinster or a dried-up and bitter old hag.

It means fighting for my right to do all those things that you hear us talk about but never really actually think about - to wear a short skirt and not be seen as a sexual target; to walk home alone and night and not be constantly looking over my shoulder; to travel and not worry about the unwanted come-ons, the sexual advances and attacks, the power games and possible rapes; to make my own choices that are not completely based on fear and tailored to a life of settling for less simply because I've got a cunt between my legs and boobs on my chest.

Fighting for women's rights means fighting for so fucking much.

no se le puede
llamar muerto
a akel ke lucha
por la vida
you cannot call
nombbody dead
who fought
for life

Identity Politics 101:

Now, if you're a man, I know you might have picked up this zine and thought, "Sure, it's easy enough for her to tell us that we're fucking up and we need to change. Women are always asking us to do more and to learn more and to listen more and to change. Do they realize how hard it is?"

I understand that it can be confronting to be called out on your shit and asked to change. But if you think I don't know how hard this is for you, if you think that I've only been on the oppressed side of identity politics, that I've never been called out and asked to change, think again.

Here's a trick that you can use to help you understand what I'm trying to get at: While reading through this zine, just replace the gender topic with race. Instead of reading "patriarchy" read "white privilege." It's amazing how the subjects can be switched but the issue remains the same. It's all a matter of power, of dominance, of learned thoughts and actions and reactions. I know what it's like, buddy. I've had to come a long way in my own identity politics and I've had to re-learn years of oppressive thought and behavior. And I know it's not easy. It's fucking hard to admit that you're wrong, that your actions are hurting the people you love, whether you intend to or not. But it's not something we can just ignore. This shit won't change on its own. So put your ego on hold and try to learn. There's a lot of lives that depend on it.

Interaction Number One: "Check Out These Tits"

I was sitting on the couch in the living room when Frank and Ted got home. They'd just gone to the cinema to see some Halloween horror flick. Kevin and Jeremy were also home, and they were asking how the movie was. Ted gave a quick run-down of the film, making numerous references to parts in which you could see the main character's breasts. After a few minutes of excitable description, he and Frank turned on the computer so they could show us the trailer on youtube.com.

I sat there immobilized. I couldn't believe what was going on. I couldn't believe that Ted would be coming home and raving about the tits that he just saw in some horror movie, not only because that is never appropriate, but especially because my friend had just been raped and murdered. I sat there not knowing what to say or what to do. Then, just before the trailer loaded on the computer, I spoke up.

Me: "Are you kidding me?"

Ted: "What are you talking about?"

Me: "Are you seriously going to stand there and talk about some woman's breasts and then expect me to want to watch them on that computer screen? What's wrong with you? Do you really think this is OK with me?"

I didn't wait for an answer. I was crying. There was the sound of rushing wind in my ears and the air around me was turning black. I could hear Ted making some excuse as I ran to my bedroom and collapsed onto my bed. Alone again, I was able to think and to sort out my thoughts. Outside, the boys were probably watching the trailer and wondering what the fuck my problem was.

This is my problem:

****

I've never heard my mom or my sisters or girlfriends come home and rave about the "great set of tits" that they just saw on TV. I've never heard them go on about how many times the "soaking wet t-shirt" and "huge breasts" flashed across the screen, and they've never excitedly waited to show me the trailer to a movie in which "you can see that great set of tits."

This isn't a coincidence. It doesn't just happen to turn out this way because we, as women, don't enjoy a good "set of breasts" or because we're not physically and sexually attracted to other women or because we don't feel liberated enough to join in their objectification. These are specifically (and often exclusively) the actions of men in this society because, on some level, it hurts us women. Even if we don't have a feminist context for it or the words to even verbalize it in our own heads, it still has a negative effect on us. It makes us cringe, burn. It makes us uncomfortable or disgusted or outraged and pissed off.

But so often those reactions are either completely silenced through gendered socialization or they're written off and disregarded as jealousy or bitchiness. And how better to reinforce stereotypes and maintain this sexual appropriation than by making a woman feel like she can't say anything against it because she's "just jealous of a great set of tits" or "being a bitch for killing the party" by speaking against it? One of the best tools of domination is competition. Pit people against each other and they'll never be able to fight back against their oppressor. Make each woman strive to have that "great set of breasts," indeed, to be the most objectified image of sexualization, and you will never have to worry about them uniting against it or even questioning the motives behind it. If we're busy enough trying to compete in this beauty pageant, we won't have the time or the energy or the support to ever try to stop it. We wont have the perspective to step out of it and realize that we're playing into it.

Which makes me wonder...Guys, is this what you want? Do you really want for us to be sexualized, objectified, jealous, competitive and silenced? Do you really want your mother and your sisters and your lovers and your partners to be (at least in this arena) complacent? Is it because we give better head when we're competing for your affection? Is it because we lay down and let you fuck our brains out when we have no words to use to tell you to stop, to tell you that most of your idea of consensual sex is just silenced and normalized rape? Are these the kinds of relationships you want and is this the world you want to live in? Sure, it gives you power. It gets you laid and gives you a girlfriend who won't talk back. It keeps you in charge and gives you the upper hand. But is that really a position you want? And at the expensive of what? Your own truth and honesty in life? Your chance to live a truly free life, liberated from your own patriarchy and finally capable of real relationships with yourself and others? Are you willing to make that exchange?

If not, then educate yourselves! Read up on where we're coming from. Listen to us and support us. And when you feel that socialized response to view us as bitchy, catty, jealous and fucked up, look at where it's coming from and ask yourself if you have anything to do with it. Check yourself! And check the people around you too. Put your brothers and your cousins and your dads and your co-workers and your frat-boy-friends in check.

And if you can't be bothered to support us, if you can't be bothered to help us change our world to one that is less fucked up, one that doesn't enforce our subordination and lead to a climate of violence against us, then fuck you.

I'm moving on.

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A few days later, while traveling, I brought this interaction up to Ted. He expressed that he was interested in hearing "my side of things" and seemed truly confused by my reaction to his action. I tried to explain that it was the language which he used and the image which he was supporting that I wasn't OK with. He still seemed a bit lost and said that he'd like to have a friendly chat on the subject...some other time. And, while we never got around to having another discussion (which is all too typical, given the gendered nature of this subject), I went ahead and wrote it all down...

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It's the image of women as sexual objects that leads inevitably to our rape and death. You see, an object is so much easier to be owned, manipulated, beaten and killed than a being whom is held on the same level of respect as oneself. By supporting the portrayal of a woman in mainstream media as "a great set of breasts," you've reduced her to something which is far less than a complete human. It's a language of dominance that supports and helps to hold in place a culture of dominance.

You support this structure in two ways: First, with your money by paying to see this particular type of film, which in turn shows the industry that the sexualization of women sells, and second, by verbally promoting it in a positive light to others, thereby reinforcing it as the norm and directly supporting its continuance.

I didn't want to run into my room and cry when Ted was showing the movie trailer. I didn't want to say a few scattered words before retreating like I've done so fucking many times. I wanted to say what was on my mind and to have it listened to for once in my life. I wanted to say...

..."How the fuck am I expected to sit by and listen to you promote a culture of objectification and disconnect that has held me in a state of fear and subjugation my whole life? Indeed, one that has led in the last few days to the brutal rape and murder of one of my own friends? How am I expected to not argue this point, to not argue for my own respect, my own freedom and in the defense of my friend's recent death? How am I expected to not scream and cry and slam my fists into your face when you're in my house and openly and unabashedly supporting this aspect of our culture that holds women in a category of statistics? One in three women raped in their lifetime! Does that have any effect on you?! Does that make you want to change your words, change your actions, withdraw your support from the reinforcing industries and fight alongside us for our respect, our safety, our freedom and our very lives? Or does your own disconnect run so deep that you're able to sit there and argue this point with me? Argue it in a room full of men, none of whom are opening their mouths in my defense. Argue it in a room where I am the minority, the stereotypical "nagging bitch," who's speaking her mind when she should be sitting there and taking it. Sit down. Shut up. Close your mouth, open your legs and get fucked. It's the same fucking mentality. It's the one that puts us in women's shelters, in the hospital, in the morgue and in the headlines of the newspapers and statistics categories. And your arguments in defense of it and the conscious refusal of any of the other men in the room to support me and denounce this system are all integral parts of the silencing of women and the maintenance of gendered dominance and forced subordination."

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If we hope to end this culture of domination over women, we have to end all support of it. We have to shatter the pillars that support the platform of oppression. We have to analyze everything that we were taught and everything that is the norm and look at ourselves and our actions and reactions and figure out where they're coming from and whom they're hurting or supporting.

And if you are still working against the freedom of women and supporting a culture which holds us in its domination, you should ask yourself why and what you can do to change.

This is fucking basic! This is textbook. It's elementary-level knowledge on the socio-cultural placement of women and the direct lines drawn throughout history of what it leads to for us.

So why am I, after all these years, still putting up with it? Why don't I have the words or the strength to confront it? Why am I not fighting harder against it? I'm not the type of person that shirks confrontation. I'm not easily subdued and certainly not complacent. I fight issues all the time. I fight in support of animals and of the environment, against state repression, police brutality, class lines and homelessness. I fight with passion and with grit and with guts.

But my own silencing runs so deep that I'm still stuck when it comes to fighting for myself. And the depth at which patriarchy runs is so complete that otherwise intelligent and supportive men are still blocking my liberation by either arguing this point with me or by their silence and refusal to verbally step in and denounce the entire system.

I'm fucking sick of it.

If Sali's life (and her death) leave an impression on me,

if it makes once difference,

it will be a resolve and determination

to fight for women.

And, for once, I'm going to be fighting for myself.

So, You Think You're An Ally?

OK. OK. So I know a lot of the interactions in this zine sound shockingly un-radical, shockingly fucked up. I know that a lot of it sounds like shit that would never happen in a "radical" space, an "anarchist" space, an "activist" or "collective" space and blah, blah, blah. But it does, fellows. It happens all the time. And, while you may not use the same words or the same phrases or respond in exactly the same way as the men in this zine, there's still a whole bunch of shit you're doing that's reinforcing the same dynamics and upholding the same patriarchal structure.

So, if you're thinking, "Yeah, maybe stupid guys think that way. But I'm radical. Sure, I'm a man. But I'm an ally. I'm a supporter of women's issues. I don't need to read this kinda stuff. I'm waaaaay ahead of that," take a good, long look at yourself and your interactions. Ask your partner and your friends and the women in your community to take a look at you as well. I know plenty of men in the "radical/activist" scene who consider themselves to be allies and supporters who are fucking up every day. The sad truth is, I've spent the last few years visiting and living in heaps of different community houses, collective spaces, infoshops, radical libraries, anarchist crews, etc. and **NONE OF THEM ARE ON TOP OF THEIR SHIT**, at least not in this department. Women are still being put down, invalidated, talked down, talked over, silenced, dismissed, second-guessed, stereotyped, made to feel uncomfortable, made to feel unsafe, used, abused, harassed, assaulted and raped. This problem is happening here and now. We didn't win our right to live free from dominance when we won our right to vote, and we didn't automatically become equals when we became anarchists or radicals or activists or whatever you want to call it. The playing field still ain't equal, fellows.

So, pay attention! Listen! Learn! And change!

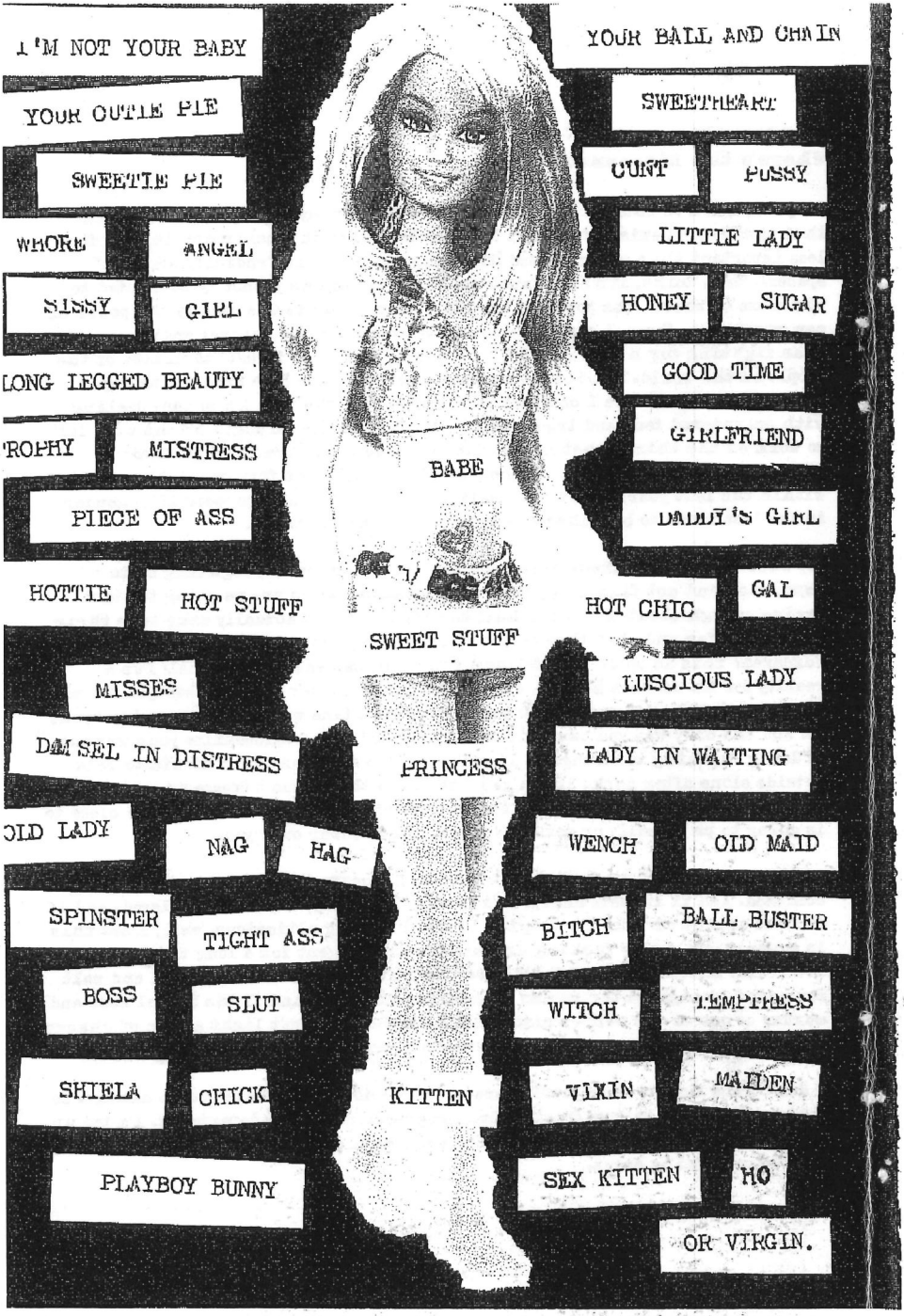
Where's the Disconnect?

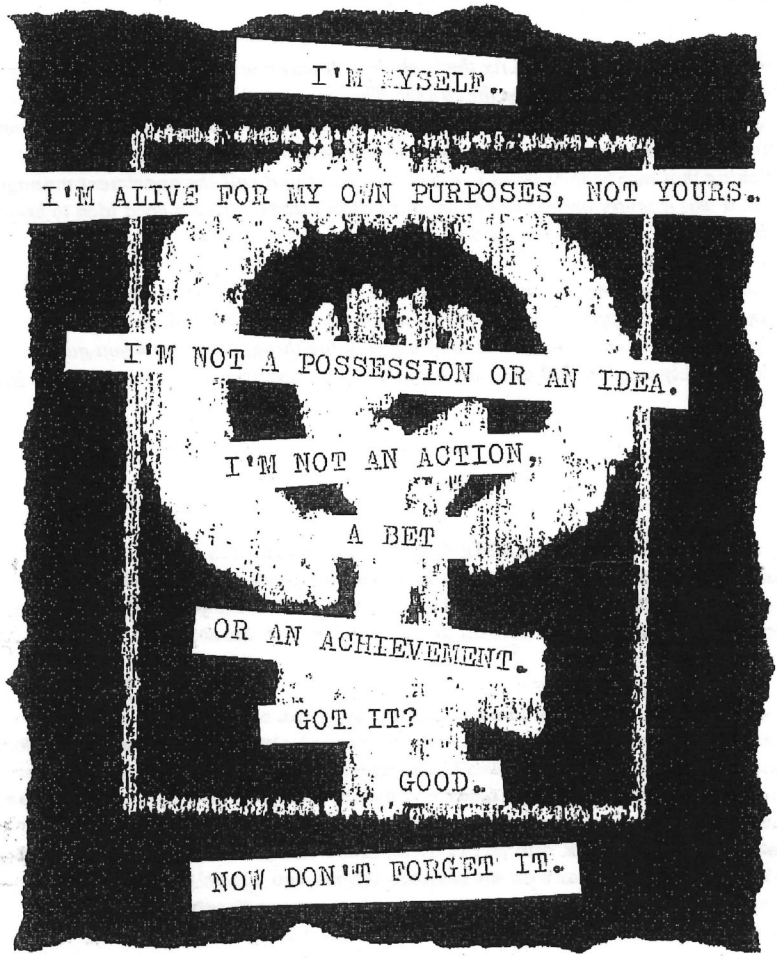
Oh yeah, and I've noticed this fucked up trait in many men of either denying that the problem exists (at least to the extent that it does) or writing it off as less important than other issues (this happens heaps in "radical/activist" spaces). Well, folks, it's all connected. The abuse of the planet is connected to the abuse of women. The power of the state over people is the same as the power of men over women. Sure, I care more about fighting for the natural environment than fighting for human rights. I care more about the forests than most of the people in the world. But it's my sex that seems to be the base for everything. I have to feel safe before I can feel passionate. Half the time I'm so busy dealing with engendered fear and trauma that I don't have the strength or the will left to work on the things that I love. One in three women are raped in their lifetimes! Most of the women I know have dealt with some form of sexual assault within the last year! That's the reality for us. But it always seems like gender is the last issue to be talked about, focused on and changed.

So, where's the disconnect here? How are we, as a movement, fighting state repression and not fighting gendered oppression? When are we going to start caring enough about the other half the population to actually make sure their lives are safer and that they're not still getting fucked over and raped and murdered? This is political, fellows! It's political and it's personal! It's a reality for us. It hits home on all fronts. Sali's murder was the catalyst for me, but this shit's been brewing for years. It's about time we all did something about it. And the only way you can sit back and theorize or philosophize your way out of doing anything to change is if you're on the side that isn't afraid to walk outside alone after dark, if you're on the side that doesn't freeze up every time you pass a construction site or live in constant fear that someone you're close to is going to physically or sexually assert their power over you.

If any of this seems confusing, it's because I'm confused. I'm really fucking confused. And if it seems angry, it's because I'm angry. I'm fucking pissed. And if it seems urgent or like I'm drawing lines or making ultimatums, well, I am. This is urgent. It's really fucking urgent. It's been urgent for a long time, but now it's really hitting home. I don't have the luxury of time to sit around and wait for a slow change in the realms of gendered violence. And if the brutal rape and murder of one of our own - a sister and a comrade - doesn't light a fire of change under your ass, then something is seriously wrong with that.

I don't know how to make people care. I don't know how to make people change. So I guess this zine is just about my own progression in this department. I'm fed up and I'm fighting back. It's not a choice for me. I don't have that luxury. It's my life we're talking about.


I'M NOT YOUR BABY
YOUR CUTIE PIE
SWEETIE PIE
WHORE
ANGEL
SISSY
GIRL
LONG LEGGED BEAUTY
TROPHY
MISTRESS
PIECE OF ASS
HOTTIE
HOT STUFF
MISSES
DAMSEL IN DISTRESS
OLD LADY
NAG
HAG
SPINSTER
TIGHT ASS
BOSS
SLUT
SHIELA
CHICK
PLAYBOY BUNNY
YOUR BALL AND CHAIN
SWEETHEART
CUNT
PUSSY
LITTLE LADY
HONEY
SUGAR
GOOD TIME
GIRLFRIEND
DADDY'S GIRL
GAL
HOT CHIC
LUSCIOUS LADY
LADY IN WAITING
WENCH
OLD MAID
BITCH
BALL BUSTER
WITCH
TEMPTRESS
VIXIN
MAIDEN
SEX KITTEN
HO
OR VIRGIN.
BABE
SWEET STUFF
PRINCESS
KITTEN


I'M MYSELF.
I'M ALIVE FOR MY OWN PURPOSES, NOT YOURS.
I'M NOT A POSSESSION OR AN IDEA.
I'M NOT AN ACTION,
A BET
OR AN ACHIEVEMENT.
GOT IT?
GOOD.
NOW DON'T FORGET IT.

Interaction Number Two: "Not to be a Girl, or Anything..."

Frank and Kevin were trying to fix the back door. It was one of those big sliding glass doors and it was getting stuck in the runner. They were pushing it back and forth, trying to figure out where it was getting jammed, when they realized that the glass was starting to come out from the frame. I was standing nearby and considered mentioning that maybe they should stop at that point and call the apartment manager. I mean, it was a pretty useless situation and I didn't think it was a good idea to keep pushing the door until they totally broke it.

But I decided to keep my mouth shut and leave the whole thing up to them, not wanting to be the nagging voice of reason, when all of a sudden Ted walks in. He surveys the situation and says, "Not to be a girl or anything, but I think you guys should probably wait on that and call the apartment manager before you totally break the door."

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Now, this may not seem like a big deal to you, especially if you're a male-socialized individual. But for me, hearing my gender being used as an insult cuts deep. It reinforces the already-popular belief that my gender is not as desirable as the other, that it is weaker in some way and therefore less valuable.

Why do I still hear words like pussy, sissy, cunt and girl being used to put someone down, even in circles where racial slurs and other derogatory language has been curbed? When these words are used as insults, it never escapes my attention. NEVER. I may not speak up every time and address the issue, but I cringe, I renew my detest for society and its patriarchal constructs and I chalk one point up against the person who used that word as either being ignorant or an asshole (these two classifications being separated by whether or not that person has any understanding of the value and weight of this specific use of their language).

I tend to give people the benefit of the doubt (another gendered quality) and assume that they have simply never realized that others might be offended by these terms and that this type of language is inextricably connected to actions such as rape and domestic violence and that they are supporting a system of patriarchy and oppression by using female associations in a degrading way. But if I know that the person in

question has, in fact, been versed on this issue, especially if I've brought it up to them personally and explained my reasons and stated how uncomfortable I am with those terms and how I feel insulted and negatively effected by the use of those terms, then I begin to chalk that person up as someone who's unwillingness to change is likely built on a self-centered and reinforced ego that is barring their ability to show a decent level of respect to those around them.

Being ignorant can only be an excuse for so long. Once you've heard the arguments and listened to the concerns and struggles of your female comrades, isn't it time to begin to change? Change your fucking language, man! It's not that hard and it's really fucking important.

Language:

Language is what we use to express ourselves, to communicate with those around us and to shape our perspectives and our world. We have direct power over this - whether we want to create more balance in our communities or mirror the imbalance that we see in the mainstream.

Language is powerful. When you speak, you're not simply making sounds, you're communicating. Words are not "just words" and statements are not "just statements." They are expressions of how we feel and what we think and of our history and our future and how we perceive things.

There was a study that I read about in one of my social psychology courses that very simply expressed the power of language. I can't quite remember all the details of the study, but here's the gist of it:

> It was a study that took place in grade school classrooms where some groups of kids were not allowed to use derogatory racist or sexist terms, even if they were "only joking" or simply repeating something they'd hard somebody else say. No language was allowed that would reinforce the idea of a dominant or subordinate group of people in these particular classrooms, while those rules didn't apply in the other classrooms. At the end of the study, a year or so later, it came as no surprise that the children in the classrooms that had removed degrading language from their space had a stronger sense of equality with each other than the others who were allowed to continue putting each other down in those all-too-common ways.

And, while there's always variables to any study, the ideas expressed here seem so simple, so basic, yet it's a level of understanding that most people don't seem to get. I'll ask people to not use certain words around me that have historically (and currently) been used to degrade women, and yet they continue to use them. It's something that I can't wrap my head around.

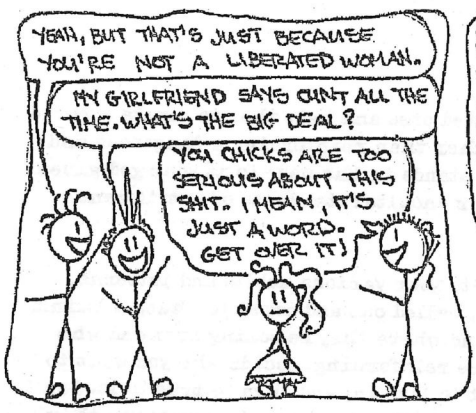
If someone tells you that what you're saying offends them or that the language you're using makes them feel inadequate, inferior, angry or oppressed, wouldn't you want to change your language to accommodate them? I mean, it's not that hard and it would show them a lot of respect. Don't you

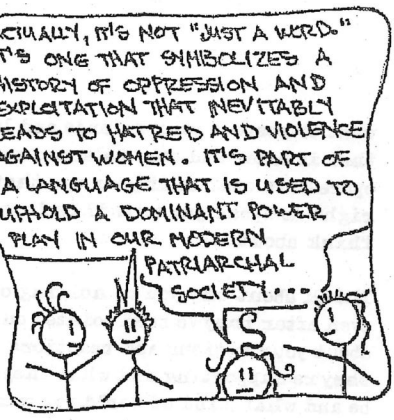
want to respect your friends and loved ones and help them to create a world that is safer and more balanced rather than reinforcing a dangerous and oppressive one? Is it your ego that stands in the way? Is it your god-given right to speak your mind? Is it your enculturated sense of entitlement? Think about it!

Think about why you're holding onto your various habits and patterns, even after they've been pointed out, called out and asked to change. Think about your actions and reactions and where they're coming from and who they're supporting and what they're reinforcing. Decide who you want to be and what kind of world you want to live in, and then be true to it. Don't do something or say something or not do it or say it just because you think you're gonna be called out or shunned. Do it because you fucking mean it, because it's how you want to live. Be yourself - your real and honest and intentional self. And it that's a self that supports me and my safety and my respect and that of all women, then I'm glad you're on my side. And if it's a self that reinforces patriarchy and oppressive language and behavior, then at least I know where you stand. You stand against me and everything that I am. You stand against equality, against safety and against all women, and you can get the fuck out of my life.

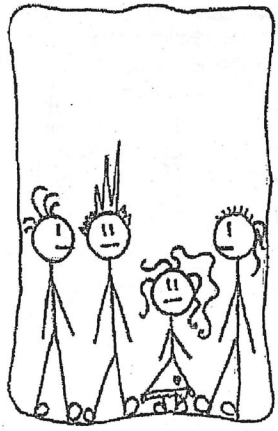
– AN ALL-TOO-COMMON INTERACTION –

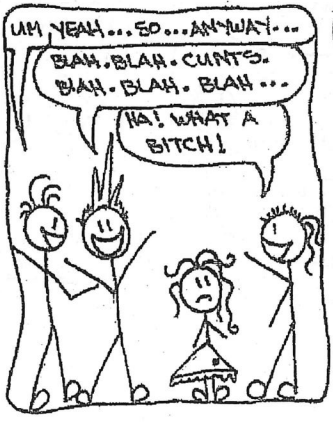
BLAH. BLAH. BLAH. CUNTS.
BLAH. WANKERS.
BLAH. BLAH. CUNTS.
HAHAHA!
UM, GUYS, I'M NOT COMFORTABLE WITH YOU USING THE WORD "CUNT" AS A DEROGATORY WORD FOR SOMEONE YOU DON'T LIKE. I FIND IT OFFENSIVE AND INSULTING.

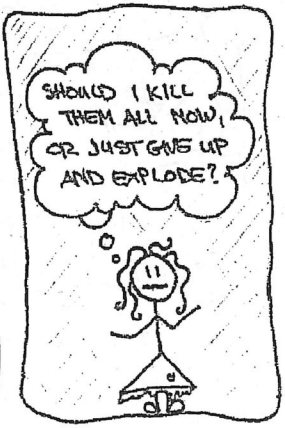

YEAH, BUT THAT'S JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT A LIBERATED WOMAN.
MY GIRLFRIEND SAYS CUNT ALL THE TIME. WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?
YOU CHICKS ARE TOO SERIOUS ABOUT THIS SHIT. I MEAN, IT'S JUST A WORD. GET OVER IT!


ACTUALLY, IT'S NOT "JUST A WORD." IT'S ONE THAT SYMBOLIZES A HISTORY OF OPPRESSION AND EXPLOITATION THAT INEVITABLY LEADS TO HATRED AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. IT'S PART OF A LANGUAGE THAT IS USED TO UPHOLD A DOMINANT POWER PLAY IN OUR MODERN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY...

...AND I DON'T CARE IF YOUR GIRLFRIEND SAYS CUNT OR NOT. THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD. IT'S TOTALLY DIFFERENT. MAYBE SHE'S RECLAIMED THE WORD FOR HERSELF AND IS USING IT TO HER POWER. MAYBE NOT. BUT, AT ANY RATE, A WOMAN USING THAT WORD DOESN'T CARRY THE SAME WEIGHT AS A MAN. IT'S LIKE A WHITE GUY USING A RACIAL SLUR. THINK ABOUT THE HISTORICAL WEIGHT OF OPPRESSION THAT THE SPEAKER HOLDS. AND, FOR YOUR INFORMATION, I DO CONSIDER MYSELF TO BE A LIBERATED WOMAN, OR AT LEAST I'M STRUGGLING TO BE ONE, WHICH IS WHY I'M SPEAKING UP NOW RATHER THAN REMAINING SILENT AND COMPLICENT LIKE WOMEN ARE TAUGHT TO. OH, AND BTW, I'M NOT A "CHICK."







On Reclaiming Words and Taking Offense:

Oh, and for the record, yes, I do know that some women have reclaimed the word "cunt" for themselves. I know that some women are using the word "bitch" to their own power. I also know some people of color who use racial slurs that have traditionally been used against them. That doesn't mean that everyone else has the right to. These words carry with them a whole history of oppression. They carry the weight of violence and of fear and of reality. It's not your reality. It's not your fear. It's not violence that can ever be used against you or oppression that you will ever be able to experience. It's ours. It's reserved for those of us who have experienced life as a woman (either biologically or perceived). So, by the same token, those words are ours. They are ours to reclaim or ours to denounce. They are not yours. Never yours. So don't fucking use them!

Oh yeah, and I don't give a good goddamn if your girlfriend doesn't mind when you use the word "pussy" as an insult or if one of your lady friends told you that she finds it flattering to be referred to as a "hot chic." I hate it when guys tell me that they've "gotten permission" to use certain words in certain ways because some other woman told them it was OK, as if that gave them some all-access pass to throwing their controversial vocabulary around. (I've actually had men tell me that I "shouldn't be offended" by their use of certain words because somebody else wasn't or because it's been reclaimed or because they didn't mean it that way.) We're all different. Shouldn't the one who's feeling offended be the one to define offense (at least for themselves)? If ANYONE finds it offensive, why would you do it? I don't speak for all women, and I'm not trying to. All I'm sayin' is listen to what EVERY WOMAN is saying and respect it.

(And to those of you who are still using these words after I've asked you to stop: What the fuck is your problem? Is your sense of self so rigidly defined in your own mind that you can't possibly change a tiny portion of your vocabulary to show respect for me and solidarity with my struggle for equality? Is it too difficult for you to think before you speak? Or are you just so privileged that you've never had to check yourself to make room for somebody else? Are you too stubborn? Too selfish? Well, buddy, I think you're pathetic. Really fucking pathetic.)

WARNING! THIS SECTION MAY BE TRIGGERING

Interaction Number Three: "She Sounds Cute"

Kevin was on the speaker-phone. He was calling the Lost Property department of the university where we'd just been to see if he could find his missing sleeping mat. I was sitting on my bed reading and Frank and Ted were doing something in the front room. Everyone could hear Kevin's conversation on the speaker-phone. A female voice picked up on the other end of the line, and this is the actual conversation that ensued...

Frank: "Oh, she sounds cute."

Ted: "Well, she's at university, so she probably is cute."

Frank: "I mean, she sounds like the kind of girl I could totally have phone sex with, but nothing more."

Ted: "Yeah, I know what you mean."

Frank: "You know? There's those girls that sound hella cute over the phone, but you'd never want to have to look at them."

Ted: "Yeah, I know it."

Frank: "Like this one time when I was working at a call center. There was this girl that I started talking to on the phone and she sounded hella cute, but then I met her..."

I pulled the blanket on my bed over my head and groaned. My gut tightened and I felt like someone had just punched me in the cervix. I couldn't tell if it was my body reacting to the conversation going on or if my cramps were just getting worse. Kevin hung up the phone and walked into my room, past the boys in the front room who were still talking about "ugly chicks" and "phone sex." I was curled up on the bed with my blanket over my head.

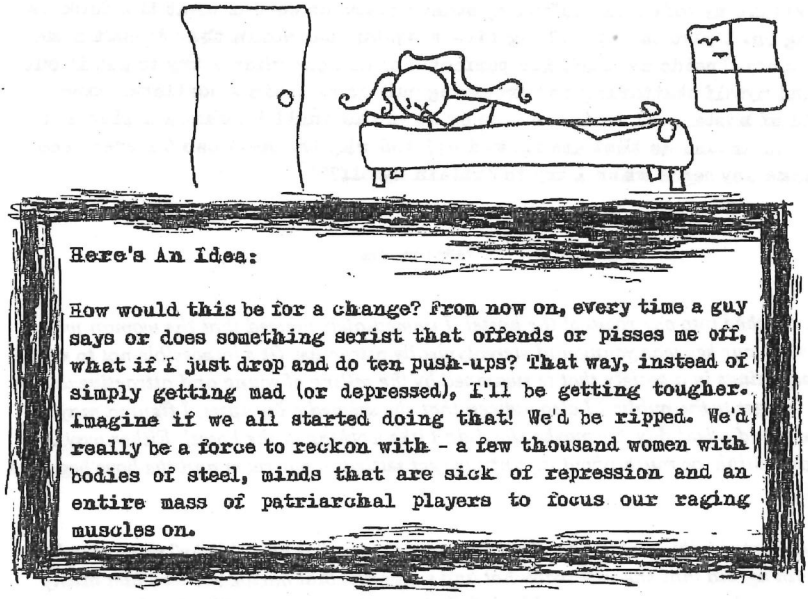
Me: "Why aren't men so fucking ashamed of themselves that they all just commit suicide?"

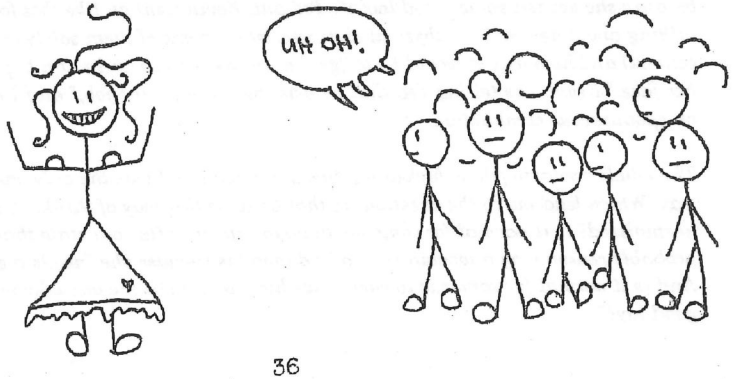
Kevin: "Are you saying that you want us to die?"

Me: "Sometimes."

It would be hard to say, in that moment, what I wanted. I certainly didn't want to have to listen to what was going on. I didn't want to have to be in a living space with men who could objectify women to that degree and not even think twice. I didn't want to live in a world where that type of thought is the norm and my reactions are what's out of line. I felt sick and suffocated and silenced and trapped. I felt like I couldn't do or say anything that would make any sense to those guys, or to any guys, for that matter.

So, I just laid on the bed, sick, stuck and ready to cry.


Here's An Idea:
How would this be for a change? From now on, every time a guy says or does something sexist that offends or pisses me off, what if I just drop and do ten push-ups? That way, instead of simply getting mad (or depressed), I'll be getting tougher. Imagine if we all started doing that! We'd be ripped. We'd really be a force to reckon with - a few thousand women with bodies of steel, minds that are sick of repression and an entire mass of patriarchal players to focus our raging muscles on.



Interaction Number Four: "Bitchy Chicks Just Need to Get Laid"

(This section might seem a bit scattered or confusing. It's really hard for me to write about, and I find myself just feeling all twisted up when I think back on the interaction. There are some arguments that seem so basic to me, so obvious, but the sheer fact that I find myself having to try to explain my point and defend my stance makes me wonder what the fuck is going on. I just end up feeling like a hysterical woman that doesn't make any sense. Inside my head, it's perfectly clear, but when I try to get it out, I find myself stuttering and freaking out. Is my brain a scattered mine field of hysterical feminine mess or is it the world in which I live and the men around me that are fucked up? And why the hell can't I ever seem to make any sense when I try to explain myself???)

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We checked into our room at the hostel. I immediately noticed that the woman who gave us our key was young and stereotypically attractive. (It's impossible not to notice these things in a society that is swamped by the selling of young and attractive women as images to the public.) I also noticed that she seemed a bit upset. I figured maybe she'd had a bad day. Or maybe she didn't like working at the hostel. Either way, I didn't think too much about it...until we got settled in our room and the boys began to talk.

Ted started talking about how "hot" the woman was but how "bitchy" she seemed. Kevin agreed that she was really hot and suggested that maybe she was just bitchy because she needed some "good lovin". Ted and Kevin went on like this for a while, talking about her various physical characteristics (some of them solely in a sexual context) and how nice it would be to "get her in the hot tub and put a big old smile on her face." Kevin was telling Ted that he was the "man for the job," and I was bordering on spontaneous combustion.

The whole scenario felt so fucked up, but it seemed like I was the only one who felt that way. Which lead me to the question: Is that because this way of thinking is totally normalized? Is it normal for someone to insinuate or to flat-out state that the most probable reason why a woman is in a bad mood is because she "needs a good lay?" And is it normal for someone to encourage his friend to be the one who will "give her a good lay?"

While this verbal exchange went on in a completely normalized fashion, casually, as if nothing were at all wrong with the ideas being expressed or the ideas behind the ideas being expressed, I was scrambling through years of shit in my mind, trying to find some ground to stand on. How could this conversation be happening? Had I been living under a rock somewhere? Is this how people actually perceive themselves and others? Are the links between sex and power really that unclear in other people's minds? Was it me or them who was wrong here? Am I truly a hyper-sensitive, over-reacting, uptight and hysterical bitch?

I was lying on the bed, with my cheeks on fire and my guts tied in knots, while the conversation gradually closed with Ted heading off to have a shower and see if he could find the "hot chic."

I let him go without saying a word. My head felt like a tornado. My stomach was a hurricane. My body a battleground. My vagina a raging debate. (Either a bad day or a good lay. Depends on who you're asking.) I got the impression that if I opened my mouth, if I let out even one small point about how I felt, I would be invalidated, shot down, talked down, put down and put off. I would be the outspoken bitch. The buzz kill. The ball buster. The femi-Nazi. The one who needs a man to "put a big old smile on my face." I felt completely silenced. Frozen. Frightened. Disgusted. Confused. Conflicted.

I couldn't shake the feeling that the exchange that just took place was the type of thing that is perfectly normal in this society, that it is condoned, promoted and congratulated, and that me and my responsive feelings were the things that were out of line (that is, with the structure of patriarchy).

I had to speak up.

"Hey, Kevin, we need to talk."

I started with how demeaning it is to insinuate that the reason why a woman is having a bad day is because she needs to get laid. I pointed out that it removes all singular purpose from her own self and reduces her to someone (or something) that can only be fulfilled by a man. Maybe she doesn't even like men. Maybe she doesn't even like sex. But that's not the point. I went on to explain how the sexualization of women and the encouraging of men to "brighten our day" by "giving us a good lay" is the type of mentality that can lead to rape. I told him how it made me sick, scared even, to watch the two of them feed each other's egos by creating this sexually

frustrated fantasy of this woman. I related it to some of my own experiences with sexual harassment and assault and my consequent fears of men and of their thoughts and their actions.

Kevin suggested that maybe the only reason why I felt the way I did is because I've been fucked around by men. Maybe I was just over-sensitive because of my history with them. Because I've been molested, harassed and assaulted. Maybe that's why I couldn't understand why this woman would want some good lovin'. Some good, old fashioned, cock-in-the-cunt lovin'.

I stopped talking. It was either that or fall apart. But I wrote this down instead...

****

Here's something I've noticed...

It seems like whenever a woman talks about patriarchy and feminism, especially if she is someone who's experienced enough oppression in this area to be adequately pissed off, her perspective is discounted by men as being too extreme or hate-driven. As if a woman who has been raped by a man no longer has any credibility when speaking on these things because her trauma is effecting her emotions and therefore getting in the way of her ability to conceptualize these matters into theory?

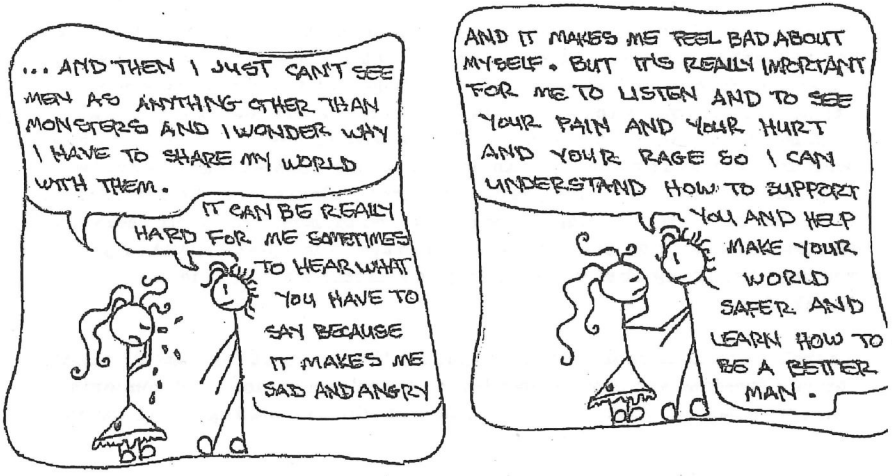
But do we discount what people of color have to say about racism and white privilege? Do we discredit the opinions and views of people with disabilities when they talk about able-ism? If not, then why is it so common to invalidate a woman who's experienced the worst effects of patriarchal dominance when she tries to talk about feminism? Doesn't this seem backward to you? Who better to learn from than somebody who's been through it?

It seems like a socialized escape that folks use when they aren't ready or willing to hear what needs to be said. It's an easy out for folks who aren't willing to work on their shit. If you're able to write a woman off as simply being overly upset and damaged, you'll never have to really listen to her explain where the damage is coming from or where the subsequent rage is (rightfully) directed and what your part is in it all. Sure, it can be intimidating and emotionally challenging to listen to a woman talk about getting molested as a child and how she's come to view all (hetero)sexual

interactions as rape, but instead of discounting her as an angry and emotional basket case, shouldn't you be taking that opportunity to learn how to conduct yourself in a way that might help to remove some of that fear and that hurtful reality from her life and from the lives of other women? We should be asking the people on the least privileged end of the spectrum what we can do to help them, what we can do to become better allies and friends, sisters and brothers and partners and comrades and lovers. We should be understanding of their fear and their rage and inspired by their ability to keep fighting, and we should be thanking them for teaching us how to be better people.

So, the next time that "hysterical bitch" starts talking about her negative perceptions of men, try a new approach. Listen to what she's saying. Listen and, instead of filtering her words through your defenses, actually hear what she's saying. Take it in. Take it on. Digest it. And ask what you can do to make her feel safer and more validated. Ask what you can do as a man to help improve her life as a woman. And don't do it just to change her image of you or to be seen as a sensitive and caring guy, do it to make the world a safer place for women. Do it because you don't want to see another Sali raped and murdered. Because that shouldn't have happened in the first place. And because, on some level, you know you're also at fault.

– AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE –


... AND THEN I JUST CAN'T SEE MEN AS ANYTHING OTHER THAN MONSTERS AND I WONDER WHY I HAVE TO SHARE MY WORLD WITH THEM.
IT CAN BE REALLY HARD FOR ME SOMETIMES TO HEAR WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY BECAUSE IT MAKES ME SAD AND ANGRY
AND IT MAKES ME FEEL BAD ABOUT MYSELF. BUT IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT FOR ME TO LISTEN AND TO SEE YOUR PAIN AND YOUR HURT AND YOUR RAGE SO I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW TO SUPPORT YOU AND HELP MAKE YOUR WORLD SAFER AND LEARN HOW TO BE A BETTER MAN.

Feminist Backlash:

I don't want to be the ball-buster. The bitch. The ball and chain.

I don't wake up each day and think to myself, "Today I'd like to be miserable and I'd like to make sure every man I encounter is miserable as well." I don't enjoy having to process everything I do and say against the triggers that I have from gendered trauma in my life. I don't get a kick out of yelling at each man who gropes me on the city bus. I don't look forward to calling my male friends out when they sexually assault me. I don't form relationships, romantic or platonic, with some underlying and devious plot to manipulate the men in my life by emotions and threats into listening to what I have to say and completely changing their language and actions. I don't set out to be the "bitter old hag" that "wears the pants" and "got her man so whipped he has to sit down to piss."

Not only are these not my intentions, but they're stereotypes that are complete bullshit and nothing more than the language of a patriarchal system and a way to lash back against any sort of forward-thinking feminism or attempt at a system of equality among genders.

Since when did "feminism" become synonymous with "man-hating?" When did "equal rights" become another term for "power exchange?"

It pisses me off how we can't even stand up for ourselves without being seen as male-bashing bitches. It pisses me off that there's all these fucked up names and phrases and statements and sentiments that people in power create and pull out when anyone on the dis-empowered end tries to fight against it. Are you afraid that you'll lose some of the power that you have over us? That we'll actually gain enough of our independence to not be held subordinate to you and your structures of dominance? Be real, fellows! No matter how "over-the-top" a woman may seem or how "angry" or "serious" she is, she's still on the side that's fighting for equality, and if you find yourself thinking that maybe she's gone a little too far, stop and really think about it!

There's an obvious backlash here against the movement for women's rights, for our freedoms and our independence. There's an obvious and concerted attempt to make us look like we're the ones who are taking it all too far.

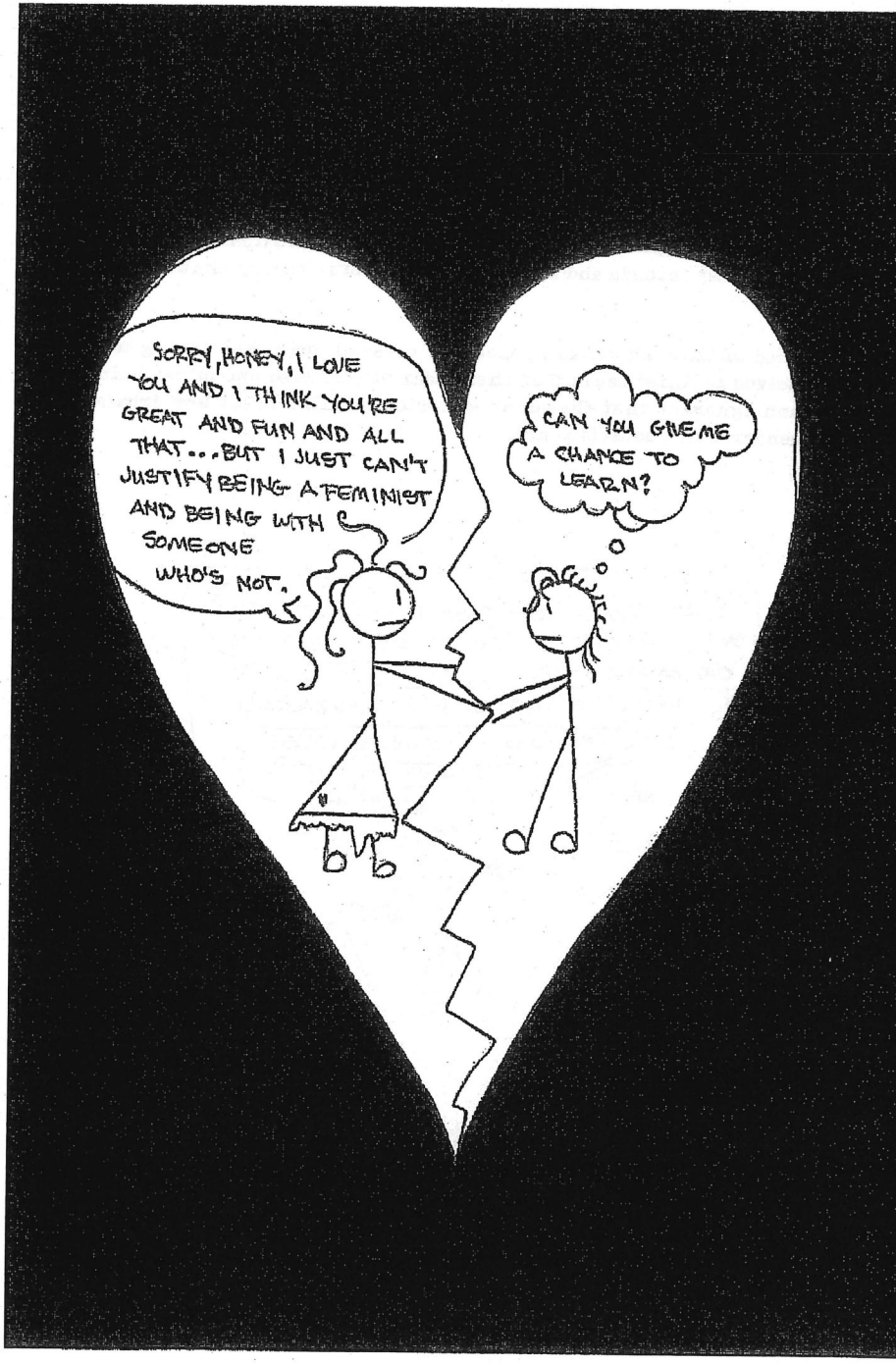
But look at the climate of gendered fear and oppression! Look at who's got the upper hand!

I'm aiming for equality and education, and you're calling me a femi-Nazi? I'm proposing that we live in a world where I feel as safe as you and don't constantly fear rape and harassment, and you're accusing me of being hysterical and hyper-sensitive? I'm trying to stick up for myself, to speak up and to fight back against the people who are threatening me and my sisters and my friends and my comrades, and you're saying that I'm a man-hater?

I'm tired of this! I'm fucking sick and tired of women hesitating to call themselves feminist because of their fear of backlash and of men being so goddamn ignorant that they don't even stop to think about how imbalanced and gendered our societies are.

SORRY BOYS, I CAN'T GO TO THE BACHELOR'S PARTY TONIGHT. I'VE GOT TO GO HOME TO THE OLD BALL-AND-CHAIN.
MAN, YOUR LADY SURE IS A BUZZ KILL!
YEAH! SHE'S A TOTAL FEMINIST BITCH.

If you think that we've gone too far, take a look at who's still on top and think again about who's gone too far, cuz, honey, the playing field still ain't even. And we haven't gone nearly far enough.


SORRY, HONEY, I LOVE YOU AND I THINK YOU'RE GREAT AND FUN AND ALL THAT... BUT I JUST CAN'T JUSTIFY BEING A FEMINIST AND BEING WITH SOMEONE WHO'S NOT.
CAN YOU GIVE ME A CHANCE TO LEARN?

I Love You, Honey, But...

"I love you, honey, but I just can't hang with you if you don't work on your shit. Read up on it. Talk to other women. Talk to allies and supporters who have been working on this shit for years..."

I've been finding myself making that statement and having that discussion more times than I'd like to admit. My last few romantic relationships with men and more than a few friendships have ended because I wasn't OK wasting my time with someone who wasn't seriously working on their shit in the realm of gender and power. But I'm always looking to change and grow and to be a better person with good communication and healthy ways of interacting with the people in my life. So, here's my question: Is that fucked up? Manipulative? Cuz I'm not looking to go and change anyone. I'm not looking to scramble anyone's head or force them to rearrange their way of thinking, if that's what they choose. But I want for the people that I love to know the facts, to know where I'm coming from and how their actions and ideals effect me and the world around us, and I need for the people that I'm involved with and the people that I share my spaces with to respect me and my struggles as a woman.

I'm not trying to use my love or affection as leverage. If someone isn't interested in my issues, then I don't want to use my time or energy hanging out with them. Plain and simple. But it seems to be near impossible to get that across without sounding like I'm laying down an ultimatum. I don't want it to sound like a "change or else" speech, but I also don't want to feel like I have to silence myself (yet again) around the people whom I'm near. And I certainly don't want to deny them the chance to change. I feel like it would be pretty fucked up to simply drop a person out of my life because I realize that their identity politics are light years behind mine (at least in terms of gender and women's rights). Shouldn't they be given the opportunity to look into these issues and decide for themselves whether or not it's important to them before I decide if I want to continue having them in my life?

So, what's the happy medium? I don't want to be fucked up. I don't want to hurt the people around me or disrespect their own minds and hearts, especially knowing so well how it feels to be disrespected.

Any thoughts? Any ideas? I'm really looking to learn.

Interaction Number Five: "Rape is a Women's Issue"

Frank and I were in the car driving somewhere, passing the time with random chit chat. Somehow we got on the topic of sexual harassment and I started talking about how I'd been hollered at, yet again, while walking down the street. I said something about how fucking tired I was of that bullshit and how I thought it would be rad if there was even just one day where every woman who was hollered at, whistled at, leered at, groped, grabbed, followed, harassed, or in any other way assaulted by a man, no matter how intense the interaction, if each of those women just pulled out a gun and shot each of those men dead. I mean, fuck, imagine that! There'd be like a few million less men in the world and we'd all be a lot safer. Frank started saying that I was way out of line and how unfair that would be. I tried to explain myself, describing how each of these seemingly "harmless" and totally normalized interactions comprise a foundation on which to rest the reality of patriarchy, which ends up manifesting in really serious outcomes, like gendered violence, domestic abuse, rape and murder. I brought up some of the shocking statistics about how many women experience rape in their lifetime and Frank actually made the following statement:

Frank: "Rape is a woman's issue."

He then went on to argue that rape is something that women need to deal with and that if we want for anything to change in this department, then we need to teach men another way to be. He said that it's our responsibility, as women, to educate men on how to be good men and that if we don't, we've got no one to blame for our abuse and oppression than ourselves. To drive his point home, he even tried to use the fact that I don't always call men out on shit when it happens.

Frank: "How can you expect men to change if you're not teaching them how to? And if you're so serious about it, then why aren't you speaking up every time it happens?"

Why? Why?!? At this point in the conversation, I was so hurt that I felt physically sick. I felt like I'd just been punched in the gut and slapped in the face. I felt so fucked up by the conversation that I couldn't even answer the question. Does that prove anything? I mean, there it is! Right there! There's a perfect example of a woman being completely silenced by power dynamics that are intensely socialized and based on gender. Now, if you were socialized as a woman, you can probably relate to what I'm saying and how the dynamics here are working to uphold this system. But if you were socialized as a man and are still a bit confused as to how silencing works or why a woman could feel unable to speak up in defense of herself, maybe these statistics will help...

In the United States of America, one in five female high school students reports being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner.

27% of women reported having been raped since the age of 14.

Somewhere in America,

a woman is raped every two minutes.

One in two rape victims are under age 18; one in six are under age 12.

In 47% of rapes, the victims sustained injuries other than rape injuries.

Nearly one-third of American women (31 percent) report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in the lives.

In the U.S. in 2005, an average of three women were killed every day. Of those women, about one-third were killed by their intimate partner.

One in six adult women in Australia have experienced sexual assault since age 15.

45% of women sexually assaulted since the age of 15 had experienced more than one incident.

Over half of the women surveyed in a national Australian survey had experienced physical or sexual violence over their lifetime.

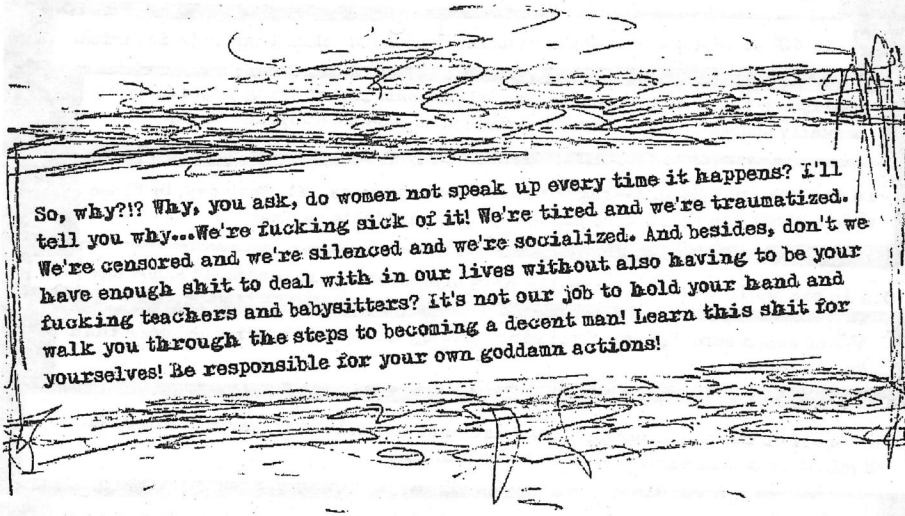
73% of women who had experienced sexual violence by their intimate partners were also physically abused by them.

Risk factors for perpetrating sexual violence include: childhood sexual experience, adherence by men to sex role stereotyping, negative attitudes of men toward women, alcohol consumption and acceptance of rape myths by men.

Victims of rape often manifest long-term symptoms of: chronic headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbance, recurrent nausea, decreased appetite, eating disorders, menstrual pain, sexual dysfunction, suicide attempts and an increase in the odds of substance abuse.

Victims of marital or date rape are 11 times more likely to be clinically depressed, and 6 times more likely to experience social phobia than are non-victims. Psychological problems are still evident in cases as long as 15 years after the assault.

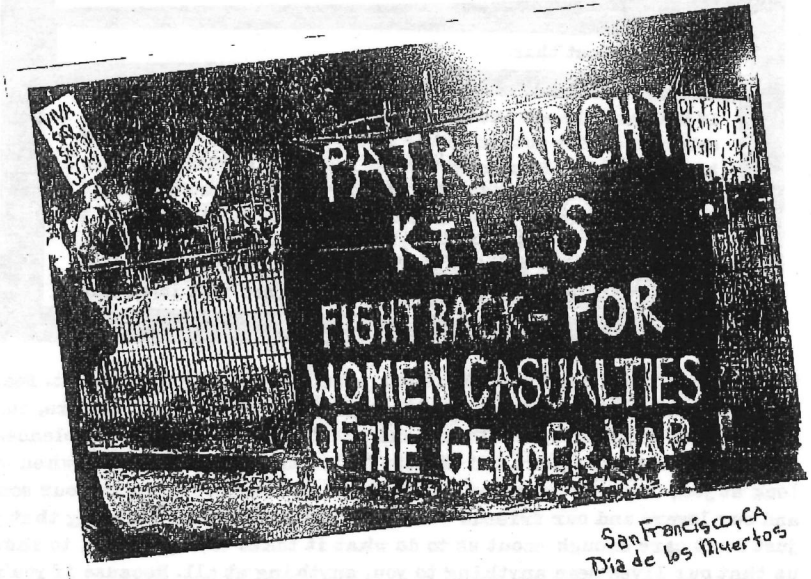
The numbers are clear and the repercussions are drastic. It's a cycle of dominance that's really fucking hard to break for those of us who are on the lower end of the exchange. Girls who are abused often grow up to be women who are abused. And women who are abused often become women who are murdered by their abusers. So much of our time and energy and strength is spent trying to deal with the effects of our abuse that we often don't have anything left in us to fight in our own defense or for our own safety or respect.


So, why?!? Why, you ask, do women not speak up every time it happens? I'll tell you why...We're fucking sick of it! We're tired and we're traumatized. We're censored and we're silenced and we're socialized. And besides, don't we have enough shit to deal with in our lives without also having to be your fucking teachers and babysitters? It's not our job to hold your hand and walk you through the steps to becoming a decent man! Learn this shit for yourselves! Be responsible for your own goddamn actions!

Read up on it, asshole! And when you're confused, ask us to clarify it. And when we talk about it, **listen**! Sit down, shut up, put your tendency toward patriarchal dominance aside and fucking **LISTEN**! Think about it. Check it against what you've read, what you've seen, what you've experienced in your own life. And then act on it. Take what you've learned into the bedroom and into the streets. Don't call yourself a feminist or even an ally simply because you've read a few books or because you went to a women's rights rally or because you made your girlfriend cum before you got off last night. Show us where you're at by acting on it. Every day and in every way. Have discussions and conversations on it. (There's always more to learn about it.) Support **every** event that supports women and withdraw your support from the arenas that objectify women (no matter how harmless they seem or how much you're into them). Call other people out on it and help

them to learn and to support us and become better men. It's not our responsibility to tutor half the fucking world on how to be decent human beings. It's something you're born knowing. And, although you've been trained to dominate and oppress through years of intense socialization, it's time you started taking responsibility for your actions and working against that socialization. We're busy enough fighting for our own respect, for our own liberation and the right to live our lives, so give us a hand and help each other learn. Take it into your daily life, into the streets and into the bedroom. Fight patriarchy in the world, in your community and, most importantly, in yourself. Be a man for once. Be a man with some respect.

And if the women that you're around don't have the time or the space or the energy to engage with you on this, then go find someone who does. Take it on yourself. <u>And actually do it!</u> Do your fucking homework. Don't leave it at that and tell yourself that you've done your part, but respect our boundaries enough to not push the responsibility of your education on us and respect the subject enough to find yourself a willing tutor. Ask every woman how she feels and ask every man where they're at. Rape is everyone's issue. So, be responsible for this, buddy. It's your shit. Own it!



*The statistics represented here were taken from official sites from both the U.S. and Australian governments. I think it's important to note that the majority of sexual and physical violence against women goes unreported. So, consider that the horrifying figures printed here are, in fact, far lower than the actual instances of abuse.

WARNING! THIS SECTION MAY BE TRIGGERING

Let Me Put It This Way...

OK. So, maybe you're still having a little trouble following what I'm trying to say. Maybe you're still experiencing a little bit of that apathy that our societies are so good at fostering. Maybe you're grasping the concepts here, but not actually feeling the hurt and the pain and the fear and the confusion and the grief that I feel every time I think about Sali; every time I think about my friends who have been raped and had their power taken away; every time I think about myself and the shit that men have done to me. So, try this little exercise:

Think of someone who is a woman who means the world to you. It could be your best friend since kindergarten or your romantic partner or your younger sister or your mother. It could be your daughter.

Think about her. Think about how much she means to you. How much you care about her. Think about how awesome she is and how beautiful and how much better the world is with her in it.

Now think about this.

If tomorrow she was brutally raped and murdered, would you be able to look her mother in the eyes, hold her hands and say to her, "I'm sorry. Your daughter was raped and murdered because I didn't care enough to do what it takes to help make her world a safer place." Would you be able to look at her sisters and say to them, "You might be raped and murdered tomorrow as well, and, really, I just can't be bothered to fight for your lives. I just can't be bothered to take this on. It's just not that important."

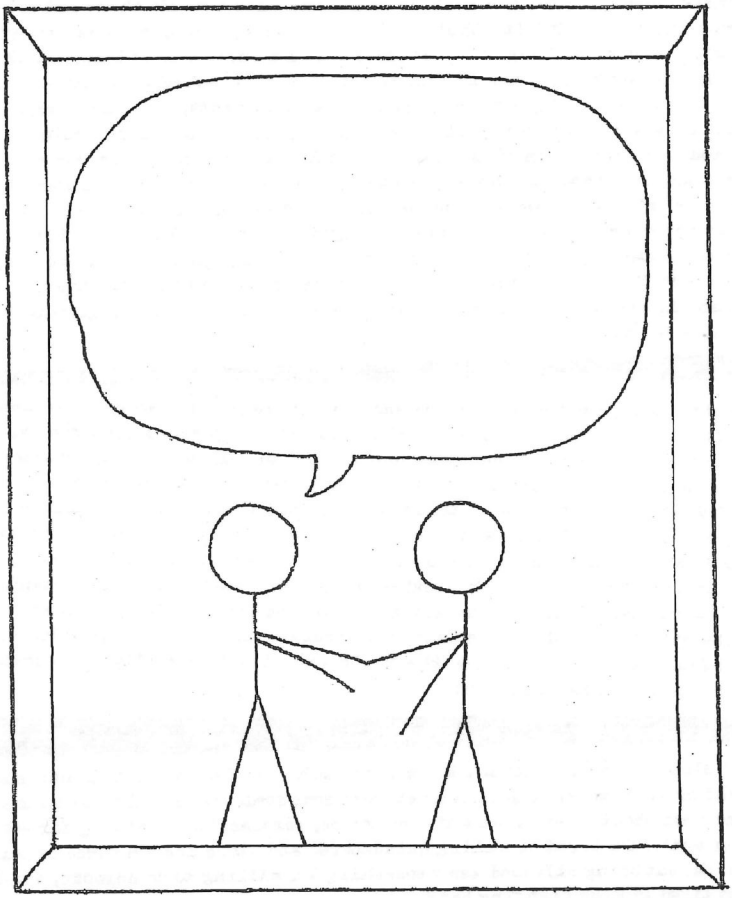
Think about this. Really, truly think about it. Let yourself feel it. Feel the hurt and the pain that we go through when we lose our mothers, our sisters, our daughters, our lovers and our friends to gendered violence. And think about the hurt and the confusion that we go through when we look at you, our male comrades, our fathers and our brothers and our sons and our lovers and our friends - think about how we feel knowing that you just don't care enough about us to do what it takes to support us, to show us that our lives mean anything to you, anything at all. Because if you're not doing what it takes to stand up and speak out and strike back in our defense and for our respect, then you might as well look us in the eye and tell us that our lives are totally fucking worthless.

DECORATE THIS PICTURE.

Make this picture your own by drawing defining characteristics (like hair and facial expressions) on the stick figures. One of them is you and the other one is a woman who means the world to you.

Now remember that this woman has been raped and murdered and the stick figure beside you is her ghost.

And now fill in the word bubble to tell her, in your own words, what you did to help make her life safe and what you would do different if she was still alive.



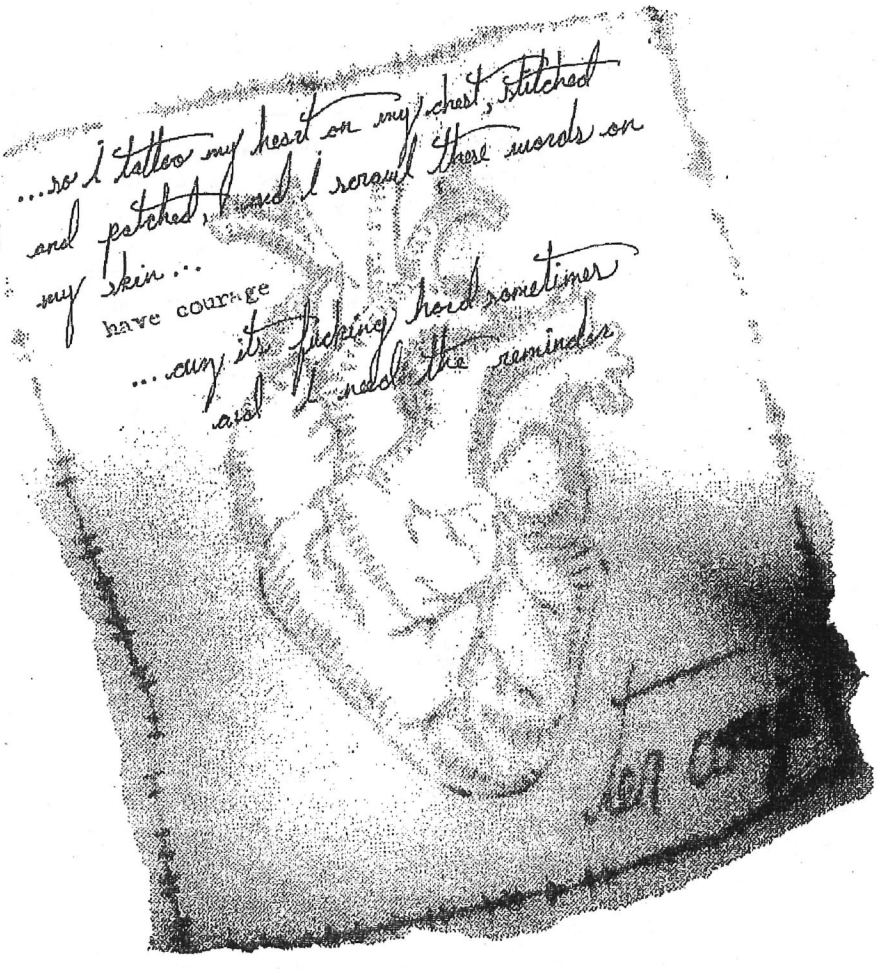
NOW TAKE THESE WORDS AND THESE ACTIONS INTO YOUR LIFE!

Not Too Tired To Keep Fighting Back:

Am I the one who's wrong here? I know that I'm not, so why the hell do I catch so much shit and end up feeling bad when i stick up for myself? When I stick up for other women? When I state my own feelings and opinions? Why am I the only one that ends up feeling like I'm outta line? Like I should keep my mouth shut? It seems like I constantly have to make the choice between either respecting myself or "having a good time." I can almost hear the men saying, "Aw, come on, Molasses. Why do you have to ruin it for everyone? We're just having fun. So you can either choose to have fun with us or you can choose to sit there and be miserable and pissed off." It's that simple. Join the gang bang or fuck off. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Right? And it feels like I'm never able to beat 'em (a.k.a. attain my own self-respect and freedom as a woman) when, after all these years, it's still a fucking daily struggle against jokes, comments, harassment and assault. And sometimes it seems like the only way I'll ever be able to protect myself and move forward in this department is if I force myself to become a single-issue, one-sided, man-hating machine. But that's not fair. And besides, I love my male friends. I love my nephews and my brothers and my lovers and my comrades and my dad. So it's a constant struggle - a constant battle to ride that line between standing up for myself and totally sealing myself off. And it's not an easy battle to fight. It's a fucking hard one. It's a battle that hits home on all fronts and leaves my emotions twisted and crushed. I'm so tired of fighting, but the choice isn't mine.

If I could, then I'd wake up tomorrow and snap my fingers and every socialized male on this planet would understand what it is to be a woman. I mean really, really understand. They'd understand how it feels to walk alone outside after dark and to go out dancing at a bar and to lie in bed at night after their boyfriend comes. But life's not a fucking fairy tale and if any of us want to start living happily-ever-after in any true capacity we've got to collapse the towers of us-and-them privilege and begin respecting each other on an equal level. So, no, I'm not trying to talk shit on men and set up a system where women have complete power and men are our indentured servants, but I am ready (finally) to start speaking my mind. To tell people that this struggle for my own recognition and respect fucking hurts and to ask the people around me to actually start working on their shit in this department.

I'm not alone in this, fellows. I know that much. And I'm hoping to inspire some thought or discussion or action or at least some feedback. I'd like to hear from you and hear about where you're at. And for me, personally, I'm aiming for some level of unity. I'm tired of feeling outnumbered and alone and I'm tired of being the bitch, but being silenced isn't something I'm willing to do anymore, and I'm not too tired to keep fighting back.


...so I tattoo my heart on my chest, stitched and patched, ...and I scrawl these words on my skin...
have courage
...cuz it's fucking hard sometimes and I needs the reminder

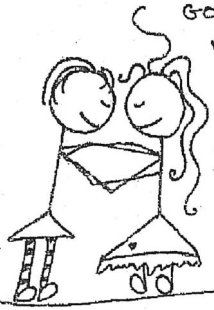
please please please

write to me

love_and_rage@riseup.net

THANK YOU, NELL, FOR BEING SO SUPPORTIVE THROUGHOUT THIS WRITING PROJECT. THANKS FOR YOUR INPUT AND YOUR FEEDBACK AND YOUR FRIENDSHIP AND YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT AND FOR REMINDING ME TO SPEAK MY TRUTH AND TO NOT CENSOR MYSELF AND FOR ASSURING ME THAT EVEN IF I LOSE EVERY OTHER FRIEND OVER THIS, YOU'LL LOVE ME ALL THE MORE FOR IT. YOU'RE AN AMAZING AND STRONG AND BEAUTIFUL WOMAN AND YOU'VE TAUGHT ME SHIT TONS ABOUT SPEAKING UP, SPEAKING OUT, BEING STRONG AND BEING FEMININE.
YOU ROCK, SERIOUSLY! ♡

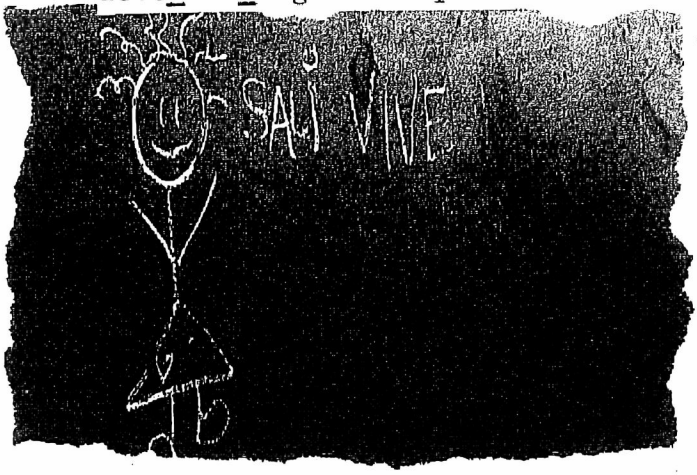
THANK YOU, LILA, FOR THE LATE NIGHT BEDROOM CHATS... THE INTENSE DISCUSSIONS, HEAVY RANTS AND NECESSARY WINGES. THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME TO MAINTAIN MY RAGE AND MY DETERMINATION, FOR SHARING A COMMON GROUND, HOLDING MY INSECURITIES AND FEARS AND FOR BEING SO INCREDIBLY VALIDATING. YOU ARE RAD AND TOUGH AND GORGEOUS AND I'M SO FUCKING LUCKY TO KNOW YOU AS A SISTER! (OH YEAH, AND THANKS HEAPS FOR HELPING ME WITH THIS ZINE-LETTING ME USE YOUR COMPUTER AND EDITING, AND FOR BEING ABLE TO SLEEP THROUGH MY LATE-NIGHT WRITING... LIKE NOW AT 4:03 IN THE MORNING.) ♡



FOR COPIES OF THIS ZINE OR COPIES OF THE SALI DISTRO PROJECT, PLEASE WRITE TO ME! I'D LIKE TO KEEP THESE THINGS FREE FOR WOMEN/ RAD COLLECTIVES/ FOLKS WHO JUST CANT AFFORD IT, SO IF YOU'RE A MAN AND HAVE SOME EXTRA CASH, SEND IT MY WAY FOR PRINTING & POSTAGE. AND THANKS KATE LOGAN AND THE AOTEAROA CALENDAR GALS FOR THE BEAUTIFUL COVER DRAWING!

♡

love_and_rage@riseup.net



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FUCK REPRESSION!
FREE INFORMATION!

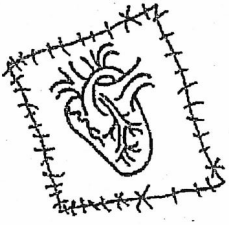
Don't fuck with me, man. I'm pissed off.

And it's your responsibility to change.

I'm busy enough just protecting, defending and defining myself without having to teach you how to help make my life safe.

That's your job.

I'm your lover, your daughter, your sister, your partner, your mother, your comrade.

Don't you want to make my world safe?

Don't you want to do what it takes?